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**March 11, 2021**

## **Frost-damaged Forages in Arkansas!?**

What effect will the record cold temperatures and snow in February have on forages across the state? Temperatures of zero in central Arkansas and 20 below zero in northwest Arkansas were certainly cold enough to cause damage to sensitive forages such as oats and certain varieties of bermudagrass.

Oats, even if cold acclimated, can suffer cold injury at temperatures below 20 F. Some varieties of bermudagrass can be damaged at temperatures in the teens and single digits and others are safe to sub-zero temperatures for short periods. Tall fescue and white clover are very cold tolerant and should be ok.

Small seedling plants can suffer more severe freeze injury than larger, well-tillered plants. Severe cold during dry conditions is much more damaging to forages than when soils are moist. A significant blanket of snow can have an insulating effect and reduce cold injury to plants. The entire state received snow cover ranging from 6-18" which should have some positive effect on forage survival.

Field observations will be helpful in determining actual damage. Cool-season forages such as ryegrass, small grains, and fescue should still have green vegetative material in the crown even though leaves may appear "freeze-burned". Bermudagrass injury won't be evident until normal greenup time. Observe fields closely; dig down into the plant residue to check for the green leaf tips that normally emerge in March. Cold injury may range from delayed greenup to significant stand loss.

For information on potential cold tolerance of bermudagrass varieties see [FSA 3142](#). Forage Bermudagrass Variety Selection.

## **Tips for Spring Calving Herds:**

### **Breeding soundness evaluation**

- Have bulls tested for breeding soundness before spring breeding season begins. See [Fact Sheet 3046](#). Twenty percent of bulls fail a breeding soundness examination. The breeding soundness evaluation is a practical method to identify bulls with less than satisfactory breeding potential. This evaluation should be conducted on every bull at least 30 to 60

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days before each breeding season to allow enough time for replacement of deferred or unsatisfactory bulls.

### **Check body condition scores**

- Assessing body condition scores is essential in maximizing cow herd efficiency.
- The processes of fetal development, delivering a calf, milk production and repair of the reproductive tract are all stresses that require large quantities of energy.



### **Keep an eye out for calving difficulty**

- Calving difficulty (dystocia) is a very important economic problem in the U.S. beef cattle industry.
- Approximately 3% of calves born in the US will be lost due to calving difficulty.
- Several factors play a role in calving difficulty including heavy birth weights, abnormal fetal position, limited pelvic area and the female's age.
- See [Fact Sheet 3105](#).

### **Watch closely for calf scours**

- Calf scours are a very costly problem for many producers.
- Calves that suffer from scours can become critically ill in a short period of time.
- See [Fact Sheet 3083](#).

### **Grass tetany can become a problem during late winter and early spring**

- Grass tetany occurs most commonly in the months of February, March, and April.
- It normally occurs when cool season forages begin to regrow.
- Grass tetany is due to an abnormally low level of magnesium in the cow's body.
- Older lactating cows are more susceptible.
- See [Fact Sheet 3084](#).

## **Forage/Grazing Management Tips:**

### **Weed Control**

Apply or re-apply burn-down herbicide to dormant bermudagrass.

- This is very important for keeping bermudagrass pastures clean of broadleaf weeds as much as possible. Herbicide of choice is glyphosate before bermuda greenup occurs. Do not use glyphosate after greenup to avoid bermuda injury.
- Use maximum rates according to the label.
- Bermudagrass should not be mowed or grazed for 60 days after glyphosate application after bermuda greenup, so time herbicide application accordingly.

### **Grazing Management**

Initiate grazing of cool season legumes.

- Depending on use, cool season legumes can be grazed once they reach a canopy height of 12-18 inches.
- During spring weather warming, legumes grow vigorously, and initiation of grazing can easily be missed.
- Focus on your specific management goals of legumes: for adding soil organic matter, for establishing a long-term stand of annual legumes, or for optimum grazing utilization.

### **Disease and Pest Management in Forages**

- Scout for insect damage in alfalfa and other legumes.
- Weevil infestation can kill stands if not treated on time.
- Aphids may weaken stands considerably especially when additional stresses occur.



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### **Things to Consider:**

- Start repairing haying equipment for spring harvest.
- Fertilize winter annual and fescue pastures and hayfields. Typical rates are 50-60 units N along with P and K by soil test.

If you have any questions give me a call.

Allison Howell, County Extension Agent – Agriculture