

2016 Fall Pasture Management

Dry conditions across the state are severely impeding forage growth. But that doesn't mean good management practices should stop. Rain will occur at some point and there is still time for pasture growth if management practices are in place. Below are some points for producers to consider as we go into fall and winter.

1. Fall is a good time to collect soil samples, apply lime, and inventory forages to plan next year's forage system.
2. Growth of warm-season grasses like bermudagrass and bahiagrass is basically over for the year due to two factors. The first is temperature. Bermudagrass growth slows quickly when night temperatures drop below 60 degrees. Arkansas has had nights in the 30's and days are getting shorter and have fewer hours of warm temperature to spur grass growth. The second factor is lack of rain. No forage grows without water and dry weather coupled with cool nights is shutting growth down. Many pastures are turning brown. So what to do? Many pastures still have forage so treat those like stockpiled bermuda/bahia. Strip-grazing or rotational grazing will extend the use of limited forage as long as possible.
3. Fescue still has potential to make good fall/winter pasture if we get rain and have good growing conditions. Response to fertilizer applied this late would likely be low. Fescue that has some new leaf area has the best chance for fall growth. Defer grazing on those pastures to allow as much growth to accumulate as possible. Continually grazing off leaf area now will prevent any further growth. Feeding some hay now would not be a bad idea to allow fescue fields to grow through the rest of fall.
4. Winter annuals like small grains and ryegrass have potential for late fall/winter grazing and certainly can provide early spring grazing if not overgrazed in winter. Fall growth potential of winter annuals in order of highest to lowest are cereal rye>wheat>ryegrass. Avoid grazing small grain stands before they reach 8" or more in height especially during this dry weather. Dry weather is delaying growth but there is still growth potential if we get some rain. Feed some hay now while the weather is warm. Spring-calving cows have pretty low nutritional requirements right now. Save the winter annuals for later when cattle nutritional needs increase before calving.
5. Most producers have a lot of hay albeit of variable quality. But with dry fall weather, many will be feeding hay earlier than normal. We are seeing some producers already feeding some hay. That means they will need more hay to last from October through early April. How much hay is needed? Here are some assumptions to use for planning purposes:

A dry cow eats about 2% of bodyweight per day. So a 1,200 lb cow will eat 24 lbs of dry matter. Assume hay is 12% moisture and that becomes 27 lbs of hay per day. Assume 25% loss from storage loss (outside storage) and feeding waste and that becomes about 34 lbs of hay per cow per day. These figures assume the hay is of adequate quality to meet the animal's nutritional needs. So a 50-cow herd would need 1,700 lbs of hay, as-is, per day. Most 4x5 round bales weigh 700-800 lbs so plan for 2 to 2.5 bales per day for that size herd. That is 60-70 bales per month and 300 to 420 bales from November 1 to April 1 of hay that meets nutritional needs. Hay testing would be wise this fall. Protect

hay when feeding to reduce waste. Feed hay in rings to reduce hay waste. Unrolling hay increases hay waste unless it is done on a limit-feeding basis.

6. Watch for toxic weeds such as frosted johnsongrass. Johnsongrass is very attractive at any stage. Prussic acid poisoning potential is very high for short johnsongrass forage (less than 18" tall), wilted forage, for a new flush of growth soon after a rainfall, and frosted forage.
7. Winter weed control should be planned this year. Remember all the buttercup and thistles last spring? That seed is waiting to germinate this fall. Waiting until March to spray often results in disaster due to rain, snow, wind, mud, and other factors. Dr. John Boyd, extension weed scientist, recommends winter spraying for these weeds. Weeds are small and easy to control, more days are available to choose good spraying conditions, and winter spraying works.
8. Help us measure hay feeding time! We are changing the focus of the 300-day Grazing Program to measure time spent for implementing forage management practices and for harvesting and feeding hay. We have data sheets/notebooks for you to record the information.

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