

AGRICULTURE NEWS

April 2011



Cooperative Extension Service

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Campbell County Farmers,

This newsletter will focus on spring forages and beef reproduction issues and upcoming educational programs. Several of the articles have been modified from articles written by Extension agents and specialists from other states.

We have planned several new educational opportunities that I hope each of you will take advantage of. With the support of several local farmers, I have established several pasture/hay field renovation demonstrations. We will take a look at these demonstration fields during two farm tours that I'm calling "Pasture Walks." The idea is to get farmers together at one or two farms for a quick overview of different pasture and hay field production issues and opportunities. Please mark your calendars for **May 9 and June 23** at 6:30 p.m. for two such "Pasture Walks." See the enclosed flyer for more details.

I'm sure many of you have unwanted chemicals on your farm that you would like to safely dispose of. If that is the case, plan on participating in the Campbell County Pesticide Collection Day scheduled for May 19 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Call the Extension office at 572-2600 to schedule the KY Department of Agriculture to visit your farm and collect your unwanted farm chemicals. See the enclosed article and brochure for more details.

This year's annual **agriculture tour** is tentatively scheduled for August 27-29. Plans are to visit the Amish country in County, Ohio. I will have more specifics on this tour in the June newsletter but for now "hold the date." If you want to reserve a spot on the tour bus you can do so by calling our office.

As always, give me a call if you have a question or need help in any way (office 572-2600 or cell 250-6665).

Don Sorrell
Campbell County Extension Agent for Agriculture
and Natural Resources

Farm Chemical Collection Program

Do you have unwanted farm chemicals on your farm that you would like to dispose of properly? If so, you should participate in the May 19 Farm Chemical Collection Program, sponsored by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) and the Campbell County Extension Service.

Representatives from KDA will come directly to your farm and collect your unwanted herbicides, insecticide and fungicide chemicals between 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 19.

To participate in this program please call Don at 572-2600 or 250-6665 so I can schedule a time and location for your chemical collection.



Example of farm chemicals collected in Campbell County

Can I start grazing yet?

By Victor Shelton, NRCS Grazing Specialist

I realize that this article is later than desired because most livestock farmers have turned their animals out on spring pasture. Even with this said, the article is worthy of reading and understanding.

Most pastures this spring had little residual left on them because of the droughty weather last summer and fall. I would recommend holding off as long as you can (and the hay supply lasts) to

allow a little extra time for the forages to revive themselves or to let new forages and legumes planted take hold. I



say this somewhat tongue in cheek, because if you have over seeded or frost-seeded legumes into the pasture, you do need to somewhat keep their competition at bay. Those fields need to be grazed enough to keep existing forages, mainly grass from competing too much with the seedlings for light. All of this can be accomplished by keeping the livestock moving and not staying on any paddock too long. We need to build some root reserves back because of last year's conditions. If we would happen to have another...I hate to say it...droughty year, we are going to need as many root reserves as possible...so don't overgraze. Keep at least 3-4 inches of growth at all times on most cool-season forages.

Pastures that were grazed down real tight early last summer and fall will tend to be very short in the spring and slower to start

growing because the plants will also have to grow roots at the same time. These pastures will benefit from a longer rest prior to being grazed the first time. Pasture growth and productivity is highly dependent upon an adequate root system of the forage plants. Grazing too early this spring will on already stressed pastures will only reduce production for the entire growing season.

So, how to answer the real question of the day of "when do I start grazing"? Preferably, when the plants are about 6 to 8 inches tall (tall cool-season forages such as fescues and orchardgrass) and the ground is dry enough to support the weight of the livestock without causing damage to the forage base.

Especially in a rotated grazing system, there is some advantage to grazing fairly early as long as you use some self control . . . animal control. Starting early and making sure to maintain minimum grazing heights for the forages is really the critical issue, but it also helps to keep the forages from getting too far ahead of you before you graze them. Staging forages helps you to be able to keep more of the pastures in better condition longer with less need of haying or clipping. Fields with more rest and more leftover forage will be ready earlier and tighter grazed fields ready later. If you are dealing with wet conditions and little residue then you would be better off to wait until forages are at least 6 - 8 inches providing better thicker growth to hold up the weight of the grazing animals. I would still promote grazing for short periods, keeping the animals moving and never grazing closer than 3-4 inches whenever possible. Quality forage with good intake will ensure good growth on growing animals and milk for lactating animals.



Why Do We Make Hay?

Forage Systems Research Center

Do you ever stop and think why exactly do we make hay? That is, what is the primary objective for making hay? The most common response would be: to provide winter feed. That certainly is a high priority, but what happens when we let that be our main objective?

Generally, we start the season by identifying where we are going to make hay, based on the expectation of harvesting X number of bales so that we can feed hay for X number of days. We tend to delay harvest until we have favorable weather which results in lower quality hay as cool-season grasses mature. Frequently, harvest comes so late that the regrowth following hay harvest is poor, offering limited opportunities for a second cutting or good fall grazing. The net outcome is that the grazing season is shortened and we are left facing a long hay feeding season with marginal quality hay.

I would suggest another approach to hay making starting from a fundamentally different point of view. Rather than having generating X number of bales as the basic reason for making hay, consider hay making as a tool to manage pasture quality and supply. With this approach, we will generally start making hay earlier in the season, accepting greater risk of unfavorable weather but most likely producing higher quality hay, though lower yield. Regrowth is likely to be significantly greater than following later hay harvests due to more favorable soil moisture and temperature levels. Because of better regrowth on hayed pastures, the main body of pasture will not need to be grazed as severely, allowing for a rest period going into the fall season and allowing more pasture to be stockpiled, thus shortening the hay feeding season.

Plant maturity is generally considered to have the greatest effect on pasture and hay quality. Digestibility typically decreases at a rate of about 1/2 percent per

day following boot state in cool season grasses. Based on this rate of decline, delaying harvest for three weeks after boot to wait for more favorable weather would result in a digestibility loss of ten percent. To put this in context, if digestibility is sixty percent at boot and declines to fifty percent three weeks later, the hay has gone from being adequate for a lactating beef cow to being inadequate for even maintenance of a cow.

Several researchers have reported the quality loss due to increased grass maturity to be significantly greater than loss incurred if the hay had been harvested at boot stage and rained on. While this trend is certainly true for grass and grass-dominant hay, alfalfa and other legumes are much more susceptible to serious weather damage. However, if we are considering hay harvest from pastures, in all likelihood it will be a grass dominant forage.



So before you fire up the equipment this spring think about why you are making hay and what you would really like to accomplish with haying in the context of your total forage-livestock system. Good pasture management extends the grazing season and reduces the need for hay. Poor hay crop management shortens the grazing season and increases the need for hay.

Time to Make Hay

By David Dugan, OSU Extension Educator

I am sure you have heard the phrase “Making hay when the sun shines” and this is exactly where we will be in a few weeks. The unusually cool and wet April has caused most of the cool season grasses like orchardgrass and fescue to be shorter than normal for this time of year, but things could change very quickly with favorable weather.

Once forage plants go to producing seed, that is what it puts nearly all of its energy into, so additional growth is not there. That plant is finished growing and is maturing by producing the seed. I have heard farmers say they are waiting on the undergrowth. While waiting on undergrowth, the mature plant that has already produced seed is dying. It will soon start to lose some of the green color and eventually turn brown. As that takes place from this point on, that plant is losing nutritional value. OK, so back to, now what do you do?

It is not the easiest answer, especially when it comes to time and labor, or even cost of fuel, but make the first cutting as early as possible once cool season grasses start to head out. As soon as the weather permits, harvest the first cutting and get it off the field so the plants can start over, becoming vegetative again. The quantity/yield of hay that you put in a bale will be less than normal in most cases, but it should be of pretty good quality if it is cut before the plants mature even more. If the first cutting is removed early, the plant still has time to hopefully benefit from early season rains for the summer months and possibly utilize some of the fertilizer that the first cutting didn't, so there's opportunity for a good second cutting.

Early cutting will reduce the volume of hay in the first cutting, but the quality is much better. You may also be able to get an extra cutting during the year and you may have as much total hay in the end, but better feed by cutting early. The hay will be higher in energy and protein; it will also be easier for the animals to digest, so they are utilizing more nutrients out of the hay they consume daily. I recently read an article in The Beef Blog about cutting hay early where it was stated by someone, "that rained on hay made in May is better feed than hay made under perfect conditions in June". This

statement is even truer the later in May and into June it gets. I have also heard people make the statement that they are waiting on the "undergrowth", or "second growth". You are actually waiting on the second cutting to grow up into the standing first cutting that has not yet been harvested. Yes, fuel and time are something, but while you are waiting on the second growth, the first growth is becoming nothing more than filler when the livestock consume it. The quality of forages that have dried up would beat snowballs, but that is about it. Bottom line, mamma cows who are lacking in nutrients may not winter well, may have weaker calves, produce lower quality colostrum and death losses of cows and calves may be higher.

When you store your hay, there are some fairly simple things that can be done to help save more of it from loss before you feed it. The ideal situation would be to store the hay under roof. This may not fit your situation. Covering it with tarps will help, but they can be a challenge to keep in place. Maybe the easiest and cheapest way to reduce loss would be where you stack the hay if it has to be stacked outside. Avoid stacking it along wooded areas that shade the sun from drying the surface after a rain. Avoid stacking the hay in areas where the water will pool around it. Stack the hay on a high area so water runs away from it. Even then water tends to run off of the bale and concentrate near the bottom of the bale. The use of gravel or something else like tires or pallets that will let the water get away from the bale will help even more. I mention the storage part with this article because it is important to get those first cutting round bales off of the field as soon as possible so the second cutting possibility has a better chance.