

AG NEWSLETTER

Winter 2010



SOIL TESTING.....PAYS!

Free Soil Testing: The Cumberland County Extension Service will offer free soil testing from now until the end of March for Pasture, Hay, Field Crops, and Lawn and Garden samples. The Extension Office has soil sample bags available upon request with complete instructions on how to take samples

Ways to Increase Forage Production

Most of our forages haven't been intensively managed for top production because we historically have a surplus, especially in the spring. With high input costs, many producers want to increase pasture and hay land production so they can increase the per-acre stocking rate. Livestock producers can take some simple steps that will dramatically increase, maybe even double total forage production.



Determine if you're effectively using the forages you now produce. If not, try to more efficiently use current production by increasing stocking rates, rotational grazing, or more timely hay harvesting. Cattle producers should concentrate on maximizing per-acre production. **Soil fertility is the foundation of high forage production; without adequate nutrients, intensive management practices are destined to fail.**

Begin your quest for higher-yielding forage by getting samples for a soil test on a warm winter day when the soil isn't frozen. Taking these samples is easy. The research-based results will list exactly what nutrients and how much of each needs to be applied.

Of all soil nutrients, nitrogen usually gives you the highest yield return. Unfortunately, nitrogen prices have nearly doubled the past few years. The good news is that you can reduce the need for nitrogen in pastures and hay fields by over-seeding them with red clover. **Red clover will last about three years.**



Because it's a legume, red clover will supply all the nitrogen the grasses need. Be sure to choose a high-yielding red clover variety and use certified seed. In addition to providing required nitrogen, clover also will improve forage feed value and will reduce the effects of fescue toxicity.

Other ways to improve forage production include planting summer annual grasses for mid-summer grazing, stockpiling fescue for early winter grazing, and renovating with improved varieties.

When to use Antibiotics

Certain diseases in cattle, like pneumonia, foot rot, and pinkeye are caused by bacteria. Dairy and beef cattlemen usually treat these illnesses with antibiotics.

The two main classes of antibiotics are bactericidal, where they kill the bacteria, and bacteriostatic, where they inhibit or slow down the bacterial growth. Bactericidal product examples include penicillin, Excenel, Baytril and A180. Bacteriostatic products include tetracycline, sulfas, erythromycin, Micotil and Nuflor. The bacteriostatic products rely on the animal's immune system to help eliminate bacteria.

In general, **you should not mix drugs from these two classes or use them at the same time.** Some products can be used effectively together because they are synergistic, such as two bacteriostatic products like tetracycline and sulfa boluses for treating foot rot. If you give a cidal and a static drug at the same time, they will not work well together and may not be as effective as just giving one of the drugs. An example is giving penicillin and tetracycline. We want to avoid this combination.

Whenever you use an antibiotic, a proper withdrawal time must be observed before the treated animal can be sold to avoid any meat residues. There are different withdrawal times for different products, and the time is also dependent on the dose given to the animal. Higher doses require longer withdrawal times. **It is illegal to sell an animal before adequate withdrawal time has been observed.**

Here are 10 good tips for antibiotic use:

1. Identify all animals treated.
2. Record all treatments (date, animal ID, dose given, route of administration, person giving treatment, withdrawal time).
3. Strictly follow label directions for product use.
4. Use newer technology antibiotics when possible.
5. Select antibiotics with short withdrawal times when equivalent.
6. Never give more than 10 cc per injection site. If a dose is more than 10 ml, split it into multiple sites.
7. Avoid Extra Label Drug Use (ELDU) of antibiotics.
8. Avoid using multiple antibiotics at the same time.
9. Don't mix antibiotics in the same syringe.
10. Check ALL medication/treatment records before marketing.



Get an early start on Spring Gardening

Source: Rick Durham, extension consumer horticulture specialist



If you want to get an early start, try covering an area with clear plastic film to create a mini greenhouse where plants will thrive. To try this season-extending technique first work up the soil for your plot and stretch some black plastic over the area for a couple of weeks. This will help warm the soil and give seeds and transplants an added boost.

After a few weeks under black plastic, the soil will have warmed a few degrees, and you can prepare the bed for planting and transplanting. Once planted, you should install a wooden or metal frame over the bed and cover it with clear polyethylene film. Anchor the film at the base with boards, bricks or soil, but remember that occasionally you will have to remove the poly to tend to the plants and to harvest the crop.

For this reason, it's best if you don't permanently attach the plastic to the frame. It will also be necessary to open sections of the covering for ventilation on warm sunny days. You can easily accomplish this by designing the ends of the covering so you can easily open or remove them during warm weather.



Winter Fruit Tree Care

During the winter months, home orchard owners need to protect their fruit trees from rabbits and voles. **But hold off on any pruning until after the worst of the cold, winter weather has passed.**

Rabbits and voles injure fruit trees by chewing the bark from the lower trunk and portions of the roots. This damage may kill or severely weaken the trees.

If grass has grown up around the base of the trees, it should be removed so as not to provide cover for rabbits and voles. If your trees are mulched, pull the mulch back for five to six inches at the base of the trunk to keep the rodents away.

Pick up and discard any fruit that remains beneath the trees to avoid attracting the rodents. Cleaning up fruit from the ground should be a part of annual fall and winter orchard cleanup.

Finally install rodent guards around the lower trunk. These may be plastic wrap guards that are commercially available. Home orchard owners can also construct their own guards using quarter inch hardware cloth.

The guards should cover the trunk to a height of 18 inches and encircle the trunk. During the winter months inspect the ground around the trees for tunnels in the grass or holes indicating vole activity. Use snap traps when vole activity is noted.

Prior to spring growth, prune out dead and diseased wood. Pruning increases air movement within the tree canopy, potentially reduces pest problems, improves spray coverage and promotes high-quality fruit production. Late February, March or early April usually is the best time to prune.



Equipment Maintenance Best Done Prior to Busy Times Ahead

Source: Tim Stombaugh and land grant universities

Now is the time to do farm equipment maintenance while there are still several weeks before the busy spring rush hits. Doing the repairs now can save time and aggravation later.

If parts need to be ordered, doing so now can reduce the likelihood of delays during the critical spring days ahead.

When checking equipment, pay particular attention to rubber components as these will sometimes become brittle and cracked during the winter.



Check implements for broken or missing parts that need replaced. Also look for worn parts that may also need to be replaced. Go over the machinery and tighten bolts, nuts and cap screws. Pump fresh grease into fitting to remove any condensation that may have formed in the winter. Apply touch up paint to any rusted or scratched areas.

On planters make sure moveable parts are free and not stuck. Also check for wear and replace any overly worn parts.

Electrical problems can lead to time-consuming breakdowns. Now is the time to check for loose connections, frayed or broken wires and repair broken gauges, lights and switches.

Remember to include sprayer maintenance in your late winter cleaning tasks. It will ensure that your spray equipment is ready for the planting season, as well as save you time and money.



Taking care of sprayer maintenance prior to the hectic growing season can prevent time-consuming equipment breakdowns, higher chemical costs, reduced pesticide effectiveness and potential crop damage. Rinse out the sprayer to remove any dirt that accumulated over the winter. Check the pump and nozzles for excessive wear and to be sure the pump is operating at full capacity. Inspect sprayer lines for leaks.

Clean filter screens and replace worn ones in the sprayer and in tractors. Air filters need to be cleaned or changed regularly to ensure they are not restricting air flow and starving the engine of air. Fuel filters need to be replaced as they age and become clogged and reduce fuel to the engine.

Be sure to consult the operator's manual on tractors and other equipment for additional maintenance instructions.



1948 Case VAC –row crop model, made in Racine, Wisconsin
Restored Fall 2007

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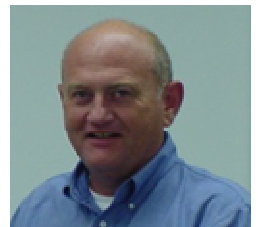
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory Tompkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Gregory Tompkins
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Disabilities accommodated with prior notification