

PASTURE AND HAY LAND PROJECTS

Spring is here and area grasslands are about ready to provide some growth for grazing or hay production. Most livestock producers are starting to see the end of feeding hay. Now is a good time to accomplish a few simple practices that could have a major impact on the profitability of your operation.

Fertilizer will once again be a major input cost this year but is a justifiable expense. Cutting costs is good, but being more efficient is better. Soil testing tells you what nutrients are needed, helping reduce over application of fertilizer while increasing yields. If you do not have a current soil test, plan on taking a soil test later this year to prepare for the future. Maintaining the soil pH in the desired range helps insure more efficient utilization of nutrients. Liming (when needed) is one of the most cost effective practices you can do.

Proper grazing and harvesting management (leave a 3-4" stubble), along with a good weed control program strengthens the forage stand, increasing the effectiveness of fertilizer applications. Proper timing of fertilizer applications improves forage growth and reduces weeds. Utilizing several or even just one of these management practices will increase the effectiveness of your fertilizer application.

Now is the time to control buttercup, thistle and other cool season broadleaf weeds. Not difficult to control if you utilize the recommended control measures at the proper time. Now through mid April is a good time to spray these weeds. After three days of temperatures in the 60's, you can apply a variety of herbicides to control buttercups and numerous other weeds. There are herbicides with residual action to keep new weeds from germinating. They have lots of advantages but carry stipulations you need to take into account. When utilizing any herbicide, please READ and FOLLOW LABEL DIRECTIONS. Be aware that seedling grasses as well as clovers can suffer damage from herbicides. Contact the Extension Center for recommendations, weed identifications or questions.

Seeding clovers into pastures can help improve the protein and energy content of the forage as well as decrease the nitrogen fertilizer requirement. Some clovers will lengthen the grazing season as well. Horse owners need to be cautious as clover can cause "slobbers" in horses. Not dangerous but can be messy.

Sound management will help you keep a strong stand of grass that will work for you, for many years to come. With a few management practices, pastures and hay land can be very productive, providing abundant nutritious forages to our livestock. Isn't that what we all want? Please contact NC Cooperative Extension, Davie County Center at 336-753-6100 for more information or help with your pasture recommendations.