

# Some Thoughts About Autumn

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**T**he word 'autumn' suggests cooler weather, football, and scenic drives through brightly colored forests in the mountains. Autumn may seem far away in the hot days of August but it's time for cattle producers to start planning ahead for autumn planting and improving the amount of good quality forage for winter. This means securing needed hay supplies, deciding what to plant, applying lime, and purchasing seed of desired varieties. Let's review some items that affect winter and spring forage supplies for beef cattle herds.

## Hay

With a late spring followed by drought, it's been a tough year for hay production in many areas of Georgia. If you are short of hay, try to purchase needed hay supplies now as it is likely that prices will be higher in winter.

## Limit grazing of winter annual pasture

Consider planting rye, oats or wheat early on prepared land to supplement supplies of poor quality hay. Plant during late September to early October in the Coastal Plain, mid-September to early October in the Piedmont, and early September to mid-September in the Limestone Valley. Plant fungicide-treated seed to reduce disease problems. If your rye seed is not already treated, Vitavax 200 can be applied at the seed processing plant. The cost of this treatment is relatively low in comparison to the potential losses with untreated seed.

This high-quality pasture is too expensive for maintenance of beef cows and should be used only as a supplement by limit grazing the cows for only an hour or so every few days while maintaining them on nearby bermudagrass or tall fescue pasture or hay. Limit grazing can eliminate the need for feeding protein supplements in winter. Rye or wheat can also be no-till planted on bermudagrass or bahiagrass pastures when cooler temperatures have slowed growth (mid-October to mid-November) but will generally provide little grazing before February. Annual ryegrass (Marshall is most productive but lacks rust-resistance

in the Coastal Plain where the Gulf variety may be superior) is a highly productive winter annual that provides good grazing in late winter and spring.

## Georgia-5 tall fescue in the Coastal Plain

No-till planting of Georgia-5 into bermudagrass or bahiagrass sod can supply winter maintenance grazing for beef cows to reduce hay needs. This perennial cool season grass is infected with a fungal endophyte which produces a toxin but dilution with bermudagrass forage reduces the toxicity problem. Disk closely grazed grass sod and drill 25 lb/acre of Georgia-5 tall fescue seed during late October to mid-December. Tall fescue forage will be minimal the first season but will be good in subsequent years if adequately fertilized. This type pasture is not recommended for grazing stocker steers.

## Jesup tall fescue for central and north Georgia

Seed of Jesup endophyte-free tall fescue will be available for planting the autumn of 1998. This new variety developed at the University of Georgia is tolerant of grazing and more persistent in pastures than other endophyte-free varieties. Since it does not contain any toxic alkaloids, animal conception and growth rates are excellent on this pasture. This would be an excellent choice for someone wishing to produce high-quality endophyte-free hay for the profitable horse market. Planting should be done during late September or October on land free of living tall fescue plants. Planting at 25 lb/acre can be done on a well-prepared seedbed or drilled into existing sod if the old infected tall fescue sod is killed with a herbicide (Gramoxone or Roundup).

## Alfalfa for creep grazing by calves

Since nutritive quality of perennial pastures in late summer is generally inadequate for winter and early spring calves during late summer, availability of alfalfa creep grazing adjacent to the main pasture can improve weaning weights. One acre of alfalfa creep grazing should

be adequate for 10 to 15 calves. Plant only grazing-tolerant alfalfa: 'Alfagraze' in north Georgia and 'Amerigraze 702' in south Georgia. Select well-drained soil, limed to pH 6.5 and fertilized with phosphorus, potassium, and boron. Apply Balan herbicide and plant 20 lb/acre of inoculated seed in autumn (before November in north Georgia and before mid-December in south Georgia). Do not graze until well established and one cutting of hay has been made.

## No-till seeding clovers in endophyte-infected tall fescue

Clover can dilute much of the fescue toxicity problem in north and central Georgia and improve cattle performance. Since currently available red and ladino clover varieties are short-lived, the best way to maintain some clover in pastures is to plant seed each year or two. The easiest way to do this is to broadcast 2 lb/acre of ladino clover and 6 lb/acre red cover on tall fescue sod in winter when it is closely grazed. Concentrate cattle on areas to improve trampling of seed into the ground. Usually, a fair stand is obtained and the cost is low compared to the potential benefits. No-till seeding with a drill generally gives more dependable stands but at higher cost.

## Stockpiling tall fescue for winter grazing

Delaying grazing during autumn to accumulate forage for grazing in winter can be a useful way to reduce the amount of hay fed. This method can achieve substantial savings if well managed. Tall fescue pastures planned for stockpiling should have old residue mowed off in early September, fertilized with 60 lb N/acre, and allowed to grow until grazed in winter. With reasonable autumn rainfall (more likely in north than in central Georgia), a good accumulation of grass will accumulate. Since there is no seedhead production in autumn, forage quality is high. Some deterioration can be expected over time but protein and digestibility will be better than most hay. To reduce cattle trampling and wasting much of the grass, erect a portable single

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strand electric fence which can be moved every few days to allot a strip for grazing.

## Chicory in north and central Georgia

Chicory, a perennial broadleaf forb, has appeared promising as a high-quality addition to pastures in north and central Georgia. This very leafy plant is productive from early spring to autumn, is drought-tolerant because of its deep tap root, tolerates soil acidity, persists well under grazing, and is palatable to cattle. It is easy to establish and can be planted on prepared land or no-till planted in tall fescue or bermudagrass sod.

Persons interested in planting 'Puna' chicory seed can drill plant it at 4 to 5 lb/acre in early autumn. The seed are small and require a planting depth of less than 0.5 inch. Broadcast seeding is not successful. Soil test and apply needed phosphorus and potash, also 50 to 60 lb N/acre in March, May or June, and September. Rotational grazing is recommended to allow a rest period for recovery to compete with less palatable associated grasses.



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