



## UGA Extension Forage Team

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## Don't Graze Too Early

By William Lovett  
Bacon County CEA

Due to the near record low temperatures that Georgia experienced in November coupled with dry weather for most of October, non-irrigated pastures have grown slower than anticipated. These conditions have not only resulted in slower pasture growth, but have also delayed planting. The overall result is that many growers do not have the forage mass they anticipated for December. On the bright side, the mild weather, plus much needed rainfall in late November has our winter pastures growing again.

This curveball from Mother Nature has resulted in a "broken link" in many producers' forage chain. One tempting thought is to go ahead and start grazing this short grass and hope that it will grow faster than livestock utilization. Try to resist this approach if at all possible. Over grazing pastures early in the season can significantly reduce the entire season's yield.

Fall planted winter annual's growth patterns differ significantly from our warm and cool season perennials. Our winter annuals go through a fall growth period, then dormancy during the coldest part of the winter before resuming a rapid spring growth. As the top growth accumulates the plant is also developing its roots system and carbohydrate reserves. A well-developed root system and adequate carbohydrate storage are critical for drought resistance, cold tolerance and overall plant health. Without adequate plant development spring growth will suffer. Craigmiles and Weiing (1971), Evers and Nelson (1994) and others have demonstrated that yields are reduced from grazing winter grasses too short. These losses can range from 10 to 35 percent. It should be noted that most of these trials initiated after the grasses initially reached a height of at least 7 inches. If you do not allow winter annuals the adequate growth period you could be losing significant yield. In order to maximize yield potential hold off on grazing until after a height of 7-12 inches and move animals off of pasture at a 3 inch height.

Historically winter annuals will enter a dormant period during January and February due to low temperatures. Use this information along with pasture inventory to determine turn in date. It will be much easier to manage animal supplementation needs if they can remain on a consistent forage source. If your winter grazing supply is limited, use your inventory strategically. The first place to start is to test your forages for nutrient content. Using your highest quality hay now and saving lower quality hay to feed with winter annuals may be a good strategy. The protein and energy supplied by winter annuals in the vegetative state rival many commercially prepared supplements. Use this high quality forage to your advantage. Limit grazing, targeting high needs animals and rotational grazing can all be used to maximize the use of your forage.



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## Don't Graze Too Early (cont.)

Limit grazing is a viable option for many producers. You can simply turn your livestock out on the winter grazing for a limited amount of time. This can be for several hours every day or could be even limited to several days a week. An every other day or third day turn out can be enough supplementation for many classes of livestock. This system works best if you know the actual nutrient content of your hay, so be sure to forage test. It is fairly easy to estimate the amount of pasture consumed based on actual grazing time. The time spent walking, resting or lying down doesn't count in the calculations.

Prioritizing pasture to the highest needs animals is a very good option for maximizing limited winter pasture. Nutrient requirements from highest to lowest are young stock, animals in early lactation, growing replacement animals, late lactation and non-lactating animals. Creep Grazing calves and forming a separate lactating herd are examples of using this strategy.

Rotational grazing can also help stretch your forage needs. Studies show that properly rotated and rested pastures can support 10 to 25 percent higher stocking rates. Andre (2003). You will need to subdivide your paddocks into enough sections to allow a 21 to 45 day rest period before grazing again in order to utilize this system.

All of these systems can be combined in various ways to best meet your farm's needs. Be sure to plan your winter grazing to best take advantage of your winter forage supply and prevent overgrazing or grazing too early. The best decisions regarding these systems can be made by having your forages tested for nutrient content.

Contact your local extension office for assistance with developing a plan for your farm.

## Opportunity to "Buy Up" NAP Coverage until Jan. 15th

USDA's Farm Service Agency announced changes to the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for crops that have traditionally been ineligible for federal crop insurance such as vegetables, forages (hay crops, not grazing), fruit, floriculture, ornamental nursery crops, turf grass, honey and energy crops.

The previous farm bill NAP provisions only offered coverage at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceeded 50 percent of expected production. Now farmers can buy NAP coverage up to 65 percent of their expected production at 100 percent of the average market price. The cost of the buy-up per acres will be dependent on the crop insured and the value of the crop and the farmer's annual production history.

If the application deadline for an eligible crop under NAP has already passed, farmers have until Jan. 14, 2015, to choose expanded NAP coverage. Contact your local branch of the FSA for more information.

## Upcoming Events

### American Forage and Grassland Council's Annual Meeting

January 11-14, 2015 | St. Louis, MO

### 2015 UGA Master Cattlemen's Program

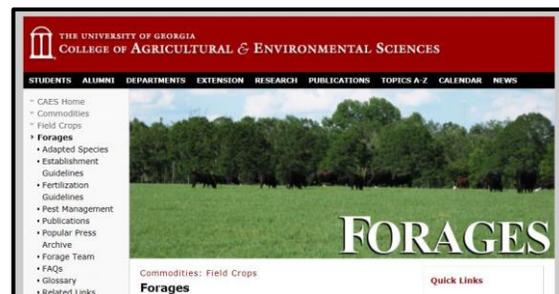
Ben Hill County

January 20 thru March 10

For more information, Blake Crabtree 229-426-5175

Looking for more forage information?

Be sure to visit  
**GeorgiaForages.com!**



# Forage Brassicas for the Winter Feed Gap

By Sam Ingram

*Effingham County CEA*

We are in the holiday season! Folks are searching for last minute gifts, relatives are making travel plans and cattle are hanging by the gate waiting for the next bale of hay. Although we may never get away from Christmas Eve shopping or convince relatives to stay at home for the holidays, we may be able to limit the amount of hay fed during the winter. Forage brassicas including rape, kale, turnips, and swedes are high yielding, high quality crops can be utilized as forage. Producers searching for a forage to reduce feeding costs or looking to background young calves may have an option with these forage brassicas. They produce large quantities of leaves and roots in the late fall and early winter when perennial forages begin to decline in nutritional value and yield in the southeast (SE) region. Crude protein levels can range from 18-25% depending on the species planted.

**Establishment:** Depending on the area, producers should plant early enough in the fall to allow for adequate growth for grazing. Soil moisture levels are traditionally low during this planting window as mentioned by Mr. Will Lovett in our previous edition, so proper planning is crucial to be ready to take advantage of adequate moisture levels. If you are looking to establish this forage into existing sod with a no-till drill, a chemical burn down will be needed to decrease weed competition. For specific recommendations on establishment of certain forage brassicas, contact your local county extension agent.

**Grazing Management:** To maximize forage production and subsequently animal performance, a rotational grazing system should be put in place. Some producers refer to this as “mob-grazing” in which the cattle are only allowed to graze for a couple of hours. While other producers rotate on a weekly basis. Both grazing systems allow for proper recovery time for the forage is allowed in and both should be looked at closely by producers wanting to maximize production. Digestibility is very high in forage brassicas and can affect proper rumen activity if it is the only forage option. Another option of forage such as grass, hay or stockpiled pasture should be provided to cattle to maintain proper rumen function.

Issues with forage brassicas include bloat, nitrate poisoning, polioencephalomalacia and hemolytic anemia. Just like other issues cattle producers face, they can be avoided with proper management:

- (1) Introduce cattle to the new forage slowly
- (2) Do not let forage brassicas constitute the entire diet of the animal

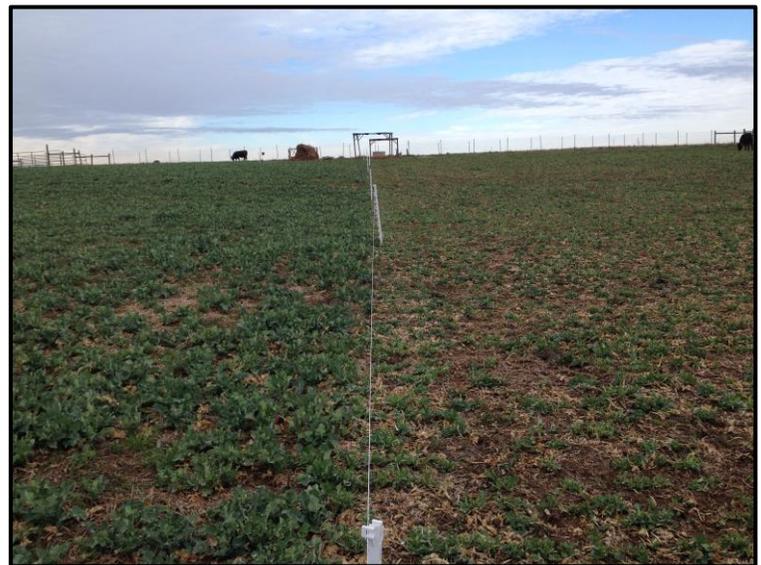
If you are truly interested in extending your grazing season, then this article may have just added forage brassicas to your purchase list for next fall, but some necessary details are missing. To receive more detailed information on the establishment and management of forage brassicas, please contact your local extension agent.

## Brassica Research News

*Canola and Calves: A look into exciting new research for dual-purpose crops*

Canola (*Brassica napus*) production in the southeast is expanding and Georgia is leading the way. Canola is grown primarily for food oil and now exciting new research at the University of Georgia may be able to provide management strategies to utilize the crop for forage and oil!

At the J. Phil Campbell, Sr. Research and Education Center in Watkinsville, GA, young stocker cattle rotationally grazed canola for 49 days. The experiment focused on establishing appropriate grazing management strategies that optimized stocker calf production and the seed yield of canola. Adequate gains of 2.6 lbs per hd per day or better were noted for the stocker cattle. Seed yield for the recommended strategy was not comprised by grazing and was similar to seed yield from the UGA CAES Statewide Canola Variety Testing program for 2014.



These practices are not yet suggested to producers as this is just the first year of experimental data.

# Timing Critical to Controlling Thistle and Dogfennel

By Brock Ward  
Miller CEA

When it comes to pasture and hayfield management, weeds are pests year round. With the broad spectrum of weeds here in the Southeast and the climate to sustain them, it is a struggle staying ahead of them. Over the last few years, I have gotten calls in the spring through early summer about controlling weeds in pastures and more often than not, those weeds include dogfennel and thistles. These are two of the most common weed problems for producers in Georgia.

First we will start with the thistle complex as it is often overlooked during the best time for control. Starting in mid-January through mid-March, producers should scout for the presence of thistles in the rosette stage of growth. This is the stage of growth where the plant is low to the ground and grows outward from its taproot as a mass of leaves just above the soil surface. It is easy to drive by a hayfield or pasture and not even suspect the presence of thistles. The thistle complex consists of several different species but they are all treated as one complex.

Timing is the most critical element in the management of several of our weeds and thistle is no exception. When in the rosette stage, chemical control of thistle is much better than if the plants are bolting, or growing taller from the center. Also it is even harder to kill a thistle once it has begun to flower. It benefits the producer to attack thistles during the rosette stage as it is susceptible to a broader range of cost effective herbicides.



Dogfennel is also a weed that has substantial economic importance to area producers. Dogfennel can spread from its root stock causing increasingly larger groups that shade the desired forage and reducing yields. It is particularly troublesome in overgrazed pastures or areas where pH has drifted below desired levels for most grasses. Although dormant during the winter months, growth resumes and seed germinates as early as April and can grow to sizes that shade desirable forages in a few short months.

Although they are easier to scout than thistles, dogfennel requires the same timely approach for adequate control. When less than 20 inches tall, dogfennels are much easier to control and producers have a broader range of herbicides from which to choose. After they exceed 20 inches in height, some of the more cost effective herbicides become less effective and a more costly herbicide may need to be used for adequate control.

For help in developing a management strategy for these and other pests in your pasture or hayfield, contact your local extension agent. Be sure to discuss control options, the timing of herbicide applications, drift concerns, and grazing restrictions. Always refer to the [Pest Management Handbook](#) for recommended pesticides.