

Frequent Forage Questions

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A large portion of extension specialist's time is spent interacting with farmers at county cattleman meetings. The question and answer sessions at county cattlemen meetings are a very informative addition to the evening. We receive similar questions from producers across the state and answers to these questions can be applied to most beef operations. In this article we'll address some of the most common questions asked of us at county meetings. Hopefully these answers are useful to your forage program.

Which bermudagrass variety should I establish? This is the most common question asked statewide. Differences among bermudagrass varieties were recently outlined in the March 2003 issue of the Georgia Cattleman and are archived at www.georgiaforages.com. Selecting the proper variety depends on location as well as nutrient input level and producer management style. Common bermudagrass or bahiagrass may supply acceptable and economical forage yields for producers who do not intend to fertilize heavily or manage intensively. Tifton 85 is the most productive and high quality variety available for producers in South Georgia who intend to fertilize frequently and will manage grazing to utilize forage. Producers in Central and North Georgia can plant Coastal, Russell or possibly Tifton 44 depending on management goals and hay markets. Cheyenne bermudagrass is currently the only seed-type improved bermudagrass that is recommended in Georgia. Multiple bermudagrass (both seed and vegetative types) and bahiagrass varieties are currently being tested statewide for yield and quality. Results of this study will be provided as data become available.

I want to improve a weed-infested bermudagrass or tall fescue pasture. Should I spray or fertilize first? Soil test and evaluate stocking density and grazing pressure. Weeds are normally indicators of problems like poor fertility or overgrazing. These problems must be corrected. Before beginning a fertility program, spray to control weeds and apply lime if necessary so that subsequent potash and phosphate applications are available to plants. After the lime has time to react in the soil, begin your fertilization program. Remember that weed control and fertilization are not one time events that happen only every four or five years. If the pasture has not been properly managed for several years, it will take a combination of good weed control, fertilization and grazing management practices on an annual basis to develop a high quality pasture. Stock pastures at a density appropriate to forage production then manage nutrient inputs and grazing pressure to encourage healthy and productive plants. Some animals may need to be sold or moved to another location to allow the pasture to recover.

I sprayed my pasture with Grazon P+D this summer and want to plant clovers this fall. Will my clover seeding be successful? Broadleaf weeds should be controlled before establishing legumes as there is no selective herbicide to control these weeds once legumes are added to pastures. Many factors influence the residual or carryover activity of herbicides including volatility, leaching, erosion, soil adsorption, photodecomposition and soil microbial activity. It is currently recommended to delay clover planting for 12

months following Grazon P+D applications and 3 weeks per quart of Weedmaster application. We are currently evaluating these plantback restrictions in Georgia.

My cows did not rebreed well this year and did not shed their winter coats until early summer. I have tall fescue pastures that have been established for over 10 years. How can I tell if my fescue is infected with a toxic endophyte? There are several testing labs set up to determine if tall fescue is infected with the toxic fungus. Your local county agent has been provided this list and can assist you in sampling and submitting your sample to the laboratory of your choice. Cost per pasture should be in the \$30-\$35 range. Your county agent can also assist in planning to alleviate tall fescue toxicosis through systematic tall fescue replacement or clover addition to existing pastures.

Hay feeding accounted for over 25% of my total beef cattle costs last year. How can I minimize this expense while still maintaining good cattle performance? Planning is needed to minimize hay requirements. Evaluate forage production and determine when grass will be needed. Most of the “forage gap” in North Georgia can be filled using stockpiled tall fescue. Fertilize tall fescue with 40-60 pounds of nitrogen per acre in August and defer grazing until later in the fall. Strip graze to maximize utilization. Proper stocking rate and grazing management in combination with good weather can virtually eliminate hay needs in North Georgia.

In South Georgia winter annuals can be planted in clean tilled ground for fall forage but production is dependent on fall moisture and temperature. Contact your local county agent for the latest variety and planting recommendations for your area. Mature cows should be limit grazed on winter annual pastures so that forage is utilized as a protein and energy supplement to lower quality hay. Limit grazing improves forage utilization, decreases waste and takes advantage of the extremely high nutrient content. Cool season annuals may also be sod seeded in dormant warm season grasses, but forage will probably not be ready for grazing until December or January. If possible blend rye and ryegrass along with an annual clover to maximize fall and spring forage production and provide fixed nitrogen for summer forage production. Bermudagrass may also be stockpiled and strip grazed in the fall. Quality of stockpiled bermudagrass will decline rapidly after frost and protein and/or energy supplementation will be necessary.

There is a lot of crabgrass, sandbur and johnsongrass in my bermudagrass hayfield. What can I spray to remove it? Plateau should be applied when crabgrass and sandburs are less than 4” tall and johnsongrass is 18-24” tall. Well-established bermudagrass will be severely stunted (30-50% yield reduction) for the first hay cutting after a Plateau application. Calibrate the sprayer and be careful with turn-rows and overlapping to help minimize injury. Plateau should not be applied on newly sprigged or seeded stands. There are no other herbicides labeled for annual grass control in bermudagrass hay fields.

I have planted red and white clovers for several years, but can never get a good productive stand. What is happening? There are many possible problems, but the first issue to address is soil fertility. Soil test pastures and make sure that pH, P and K are adequate for clovers. Potash is critical for clover productivity and persistence. Plant

clover seed at the proper time, rate and depth. Banded paraquat applications are helpful, particularly if tall fescue sod is dense. Allow clover seedlings to root well before grazing heavily. This will provide a good root system for summer survival. Flash graze pastures during establishment to minimize grass shading and competition to aid clover establishment. Remember that, when establishing clover, grass is the enemy. Anything that can be done to minimize grass competition will improve clover establishment. Productive stands of white or red clover can virtually eliminate tall fescue toxicosis symptoms and also provide over 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre annually. The benefits of establishing clover are well worth the “hassle”.

Hopefully answers to these common questions will aid you in making management decisions for your farm. Your local county agents are well versed in forage varieties, establishment methods, fertility needs, harvest methods and grazing management. Capitalize on their expertise to improve the forage system on your farm.