

Fall is a time for asking why

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October is my favorite month of the year. Bright blue skies, cooler temperatures, trees showing off bright splashes of autumn color, squirrels busy hiding their hoard of nuts for winter, and newly planted winter pastures greening up. On daily walks, it is a joy to observe the restful autumn scenery as well as to get needed exercise.

It is also a good time to think about all sorts of things. Sometimes I wonder why some things do or do not happen. Did you ever wonder why people do certain things? Below are some of the questions I have wondered about.

Why is so much hay wasted each year by storage outside and poor feeding practices? If stored under cover and fed in bale racks, many livestock producers could cut their hay requirements by 40 or 50 percent. That is quite a savings. Hay is an expensive commodity and should not be wasted.

Why are pastures over-fertilized with broiler litter so that salts may kill new grass seedlings or phosphorus buildup in the soil may cause water pollution? Broiler litter is a valuable commodity that needs to be used wisely on land.

Why seed or sprigs of non-adapted or inferior forage varieties are planted without checking with the county Extension agent? Just because a variety of new forage species is widely advertised with glowing descriptions of its performance does not mean that it will perform well in a particular area. A lot of money is wasted in this manner. Georgia is fortunate in having two of the finest forage breeding programs in the United States.

The warm-season grass breeding programs of Dr Glenn Burton and Dr. Wayne Hanna at the Coastal Plain Experiment Station in Tifton, Ga., are without doubt the best in the world. They have produced a wealth of outstanding varieties that include coastal and Tifton 85 bermudagrass, Tifton 9 bahiagrass and Tifleaf 3 pearl millet.

At the University of Georgia, the cool-season grass and legume breeding program of Dr. Joe Bouton developed

Alfagraze, the first grazing-tolerant alfalfa variety in the world. Other releases include Jesup, the most persistent endophyte-free tall fescue variety, and Max Q non-toxic endophyte-infected tall fescue, which is the first of its kind in the world. Soon, two new white clover varieties will be released that are more competitive and persistent in grass sods than any others on the market. This breeding program is unique in that all materials are selected and tested for several years under hard grazing in competitive grass sods before they are released as varieties.

Why are weeds allowed to grow and produce seed year after year in pastures and build up a heavy weed seed bank in the soil? Why are thistles in pastures allowed to grow and mature seed that blows over the entire farm and on to the neighbor's property, creating a problem for years to come? Often, rotational stocking, an inexpensive herbicide, or mowing at the correct time would greatly reduce or eliminate this problem.

Why on some farms are tractors, hay balers, mowers, combines and drills stored outside all year to rust? Modern farm equipment is expensive and storage in a shed can help maintain it in good condition for more years of service.

Why is soil testing rarely or never done on some farms? The low cost of soil testing is quickly repaid in knowing exactly what kind of fertilizer is needed, sometimes avoiding the expense of adding an unneeded nutrient, and generally improving forage production.

Why do so many horse owners want timothy pasture and hay for their animals? Apparently, they feel this grass offers something special so they pay extra to purchase timothy hay imported from northern states or they plant timothy for pasture even though it is a very short-lived grass even in northern Georgia.

High-quality bermudagrass or early-cut endophyte-free and Max Q tall fescue hay is excellent horse hay that can be produced locally at reasonable cost. Good horse pastures can be obtained with these grasses or bahiagrass that have a

longer productive season and stand life than timothy.

Why is so much bermudagrass and tall fescue hay harvested at advanced stages of maturity when its feeding value is too low to meet the nutrient needs of lactating cows? Feeding this hay will either reduce animal performance or else feed supplements will need to be purchased. Adequate quality hay can be produced by cutting bermudagrass at five-week intervals and tall fescue in the spring at very early bloom.

Why are many tall fescue pastures never overseeded with white or red clovers? Nearly all of these pastures are heavily infected with the toxic fungal endophyte which will reduce cow conception rates, milk production and calf weaning weights to some extent unless some other grass or palatable weed is present to dilute the forage consumed. Clover can substantially reduce fescue toxicity problems. Admittedly, currently available clover varieties are short-lived in pastures but even so the cost of broadcasting clover seed on the sod each year or two is low and the potential payoff is good. When more persistent clover varieties are available in the next several years, there should be no excuse for not planting them. In addition to reducing fescue toxicity, clovers also add 75 to 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre to the pasture each year.

Why is advice on forage varieties, planting, weed control, or harvesting not obtained from the county Extension office before starting an operation rather than after something has gone wrong? The county agent either has the information needed or can easily obtain it.

Do you know why people do some of these things?

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