

# Stockpiled bermuda grass can reduce winter feed costs

Harvested forage costs are a large part of the production costs associated with cow-calf enterprises. A 16 year-old OSU trial had the objective to economically evaluate stockpiled bermudagrass. The research found that this practice can reduce cow-wintering costs. Forage accumulation during the late summer and fall is variable from year to year depending on moisture, temperatures, date of first frost and fertility.

The OSU research has found that 50 to 100 pounds per acre of actual nitrogen fertilizer applied in the late summer has produced 1000 - 2000 pounds of forage per acre. In some ideal situations even more forage has been produced.



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Studies between 1997 and 2000 found stockpiled bermudagrass protein concentrations were quite impressive, even after frost. In November, the range of protein content of the standing forage was 13.1 to 15.2 percent. The protein held up in December and ranged from 12.5 to 14.7 percent and declined to 10.9 to 11.6 percent in January.

To make best use of the stockpiled forage, supplementation with 2 pounds of 14 to 25 percent protein feed beginning in early December is recommended. Read about these studies in the 2001 OSU Animal Science Research Report. Some information about the forage quality is reported in the 1999 OSU Animal Science Research Report.

Planning for the stockpiling of Bermuda must begin now.

The following is a list of recommendations for stockpiling bermudagrass pastures for best results and reducing winter feed bills:

1. Remove existing forage by haying, clipping, or grazing by late August
2. Apply 50 to 100 pounds of actual nitrogen fertilizer per acre.
3. Defer grazing until at least late October or early November.
4. Control access to forage by rotational or strip grazing to cut waste and extend grazing.
5. If cool season forage is available for use in the winter, use the stockpiled bermudagrass first.
6. Supplementation (2 pounds of 14 - 25% protein) should begin in early December.
7. Provide free-choice mineral (6%- 9% phosphorus and Vitamin A) with a trace-mineral package.

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