

Springtime Thoughts on Pasture Management

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Stocking Rates

Stocking rate should be based on the production capability of the forage and soil. In Oklahoma, and without using fertilizer, the stocking rate will normally require about 10 to 12 acres of open grassland to provide a year's supply of forage for 1 cow unit. The person that tells you they run a cow to 4 or 5 acres without fertilizer is probably feeding hay 4 to 6 months of the year and hauling in the forage harvested from an additional 5 or 6 acres.

By fertilizing introduced forages, such as bermudagrass and fescue, it is possible to provide the forage required by a cow unit on as little as 2 or 3 acres. But do this as efficiently as possible by following a soil test, carefully calculating a yield goal, and fertilizing for optimum production on as few acres as possible.

Remember, cows were made to harvest forage and the successful cattle operation will exploit that concept. In many cases, fewer cows could be better.

Fertilizer

First, determine the amount of forage needed.

Well fertilized pastures on an average or better soil could easily produce 3 to 5 tons of forage per acre in a year. So determine if your production requirement is reasonable, then determine how many acres to fertilizer to achieve the goal.

A good rule of thumb to remember – 50 pounds of nitrogen is required for each additional ton of forage needed. A 3 ton bermudagrass yield will require 150 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre. Split this into two early season applications to spread the production through an entire summer grazing season.

Poultry Litter

Don't just assume that poultry litter is a good deal. If you only consider the value of nutrients, poultry litter will appear to be a bargain. But if you compare poultry litter to the option of only applying the nutrients recommended by a soil test to achieve optimum production, commercial fertilizer could be cheaper on an annual basis and easier on the cash flow.

Weed control

Are you controlling weeds based on a reasonable threshold or as a vendetta? General wisdom has been that in a grazing system you cannot justify controlling a weed population less than 30%. Research has documented that a pound of weeds controlled will be replaced by a pound or more of grass if desirable grasses are present beneath the weeds. But it is unlikely a grazing animal will harvest more than 25% to 50% of the increased forage produced.

Don't be fooled by a false set of economics. Spraying weeds will add significantly to annual cow costs and the increased benefit would not be sufficient to add another cow. Again, fewer cows might be better if it prevents or reduces a weed problem.

Some commonly used herbicides.

For common annual broadleaf weeds:

Cimarron Max (rate 1) --- 2,4-D amine, ¾ lb./A --- 2,4-D LV ester, ¾ lb./A - Weedmaster (or similar product), 1 pt./A --- Grazon P+D, 1 pt./A --- GrazonNext, 1.5 pts/A

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For harder to control broadleaf weeds (such as sericea lespedeza, thistles, horsenettle, eupatorium, ironweeds):

Cimarron Max (rate 2) --- Cimarron Plus .625 oz./A, (for sericea

lespedeza rate) --- 2,4-D Amine, 2 lb./A, 2,4-D LV ester, ¾ lb./A --- Weedmaster (or similar product), 1 qt./A --- Grazon P+D, 1 qt./A, GrazonNext, 1 qts/A, --- Pasturegard, 1 qt./A, (sericea lespedeza rate) --- Remedy, 1 pt./A

There are often multiple options for controlling a specific weed problem. If you read and follow the label you can be reasonably sure the product will perform as claimed.

Pastora Herbicide: A New Tool for Sandbur Control in Bermudagrass

Bermuda grass producers in the State of Oklahoma have another new tool for controlling sandbur in pastures and hay production meadows. The EPA has granted a crisis exemption for 2009 for the use of Pastora herbicide for control of emerged sandburs in Bermuda grass.

Pastora herbicide can be absorbed through the foliage or the roots of plants. Leaves of susceptible plants turn yellow in 1 to 3 weeks after application and the growing point eventually dies. Expect annual weeds to be dead in 4 to 6 weeks. Perennial plants that are susceptible to the herbicide may take a full year to show the ultimate effects of the herbicide. DuPont's sandbur control data indicates that a producer should expect 80 to 90 % control of sandburs when using this product properly.

On sandburs, applications of Pastora herbicide should be made when the sandbur plant is less than 1.5 inches in height and is actively growing. The label suggests that treatment to Bermuda grass should be made when the Bermuda is less than 4 inches in height following spring green up and germinated sandburs are apparent. The label also suggests that applications can be made for sandbur control after the first cutting of hay. On sandburs that are greater than 1.5 inches in height, the label suggests that you should only expect suppression of the sandbur seed heads and not total control of the plants. Expect some yellowing and reduction of yield of the Bermuda grass when using Pastora. Damage is generally short lived on healthy, actively growing Bermuda grass. Application rates of Pastora herbicide for sandbur control are 1 to 1.5 ounces per acre for a one time application. Do not apply more than 2.5 ounces per acre per year. There are no grazing or haying restrictions for this herbicide. Read and follow all the label restrictions when utilizing this product.

Tank mixtures with other herbicides are allowed by the label. This allows producers to control many of their common pasture weeds with one trip over the field. See the label for approved herbicides that can be tank mixed with Pastora herbicide. The label also allows the use of liquid nitrogen fertilizer as a carrier allowing the producer to fertilize the pasture as they perform weed control to the forage system. See the label for rates and suggestions for the use of surfactants when applying this product. This product can kill or suppress legumes, annual grasses and perennial grasses found in association with Bermuda grass. Read the label for more in-depth information on the species affected.

The EPA, in granting this crisis exemption for the use of pastora herbicide, has added some restrictions that the producer must follow when applying this material. 1) The use directions must be in possession of the user during the herbicide application. 2) Follow all label restrictions of this product and any products mixed with this material. 3) Follow the label directions for using, cleaning and maintaining the PPE required by mixers and loaders. 4) Do not apply to newly sprigged or seeded Bermuda. 5) Do not allow spray drift to adjacent crops.

This chemical will not be available until after May 15th. If sandburs are taller than 1 1/2" to 2", expect only seed head suppression of the burs. A follow-up spray next season will be required to control seedlings.

OSU BEEF FACILITIES TOUR PLANNED



The Pottawatomie County Extension Service and Cattle Producers Association will co-sponsor a tour of OSU beef facilities on **Thursday, May 28th**. We will be leaving from the Pottawatomie County Extension Office at 9:00 a.m. and return by 4:00 p.m. Gordon Cooper Technology Center is providing two vans for travel. They will hold about 20 people, total. All others will need to carpool for the drive up. If wanting to ride in the vans, please denote so when calling in to R.S.V.P.

Farm Credit Services of East Central Oklahoma, Stillwater Branch, is sponsoring lunch that day. Please call in by **Friday, May 22, 4:30 p.m. to R.S.V.P.** The tour is free and open to all interested.

The following are the scheduled stops:

- Stop 1 The Oklahoma Bull Testing Institute
- Stop 2 Lunch at the OSU Beef Cattle Sale Facility and a tour of the OSU Purebred Beef Cattle Center
- Stop 3 Sparks Beef Cattle Research Center (Provides research on receiving and confinement, cattle feeding and health research) Discussion of cattle handling facilities.

Back to Shawnee

AQUATIC WEED CONTROL IN PONDS SEMINAR PLANNED

Ponds in Oklahoma are used for a variety of reasons. Livestock, irrigation, boating, fishing and other recreational needs. While a healthy pond needs plants growing in them, sometimes they become a problem and get in the way of the ponds intended uses. Mark **Monday, June 1, 6:30 p.m.** regarding a seminar on causes, identification and possible controls of unwanted water weeds and plants in ponds. It will be held in the OSU Cowboy Classroom located at **14001 Acme Road**, corner of Acme Road and MacArthur, in Shawnee.

The program is free and open to anyone interested.

CATTLE FEEDING NOT PROFITABLE

All of 2008 and 2009 so far have not been kind to cattle feeders in the US. There have been significant losses posted in the first quarter of this year due to low fed cattle prices and high feeding costs. The only positive sign so far, is the amount feeders are losing per head is declining. Steers sold in the first quarter of 2009 lost an estimated \$160 per head while similar steers in January were losing almost \$230 per head. These losses are expected to continue through the summer months.

The Livestock Market Information Center estimates the average feedlot returns based on feeding out a 750-pound steer placed in a Southern Plains commercial feedlot, including all production costs incurred by the cattle. They estimate that this January loss matches the record loss and their estimates go back to the mid 1970's. The current loss of \$160 per head is roughly equal to the losses posted in the first quarter of 2008.

The question that is very difficult to answer is how long will people continue to place cattle in the feedlots while losing this much money. The result should be either higher retail prices or lower calf prices, or both. The chance of consumers being willing to pay more for the steaks and hamburger that they purchase is slim leaving lower calf prices as the likely result.

CONTROLLING ANTS IN THE HOUSE

With the warming weather, many of us are starting to see ants in the kitchen and bathroom. Primarily, the ants are looking for a source of water, but they will also eat anything edible they can find. While the impulse is to get out the can of insecticide and spray the little critters, this will only kill the ones you can see and not reduce the colony at all. The only way to really stop them in the house is to kill the queen. Most of the ants that come in the house are the odorous house ants. These ants will make a home in the walls, under window sills, in cracks or in many places outside. Carefully sealing cracks around windows, trim moldings and counters will slow them down but the colony will have to be killed to stop their entry. The best, but slowest way to kill the colony is to use baits that will attract a large number of ants. They will take the poison back to the colony and will poison the whole nest. Place the baits next to the trail and the ants will do the rest. There are many different brands of baits, but in my experience, not all work. The faster killing baits are Combat Quick Kill and the Raid Ant Bait II. The Combat Gel and the Terro Ant Killer also work well, but slower. The Terro product uses boric acid in a sugar syrup base, so is safe around food and children. However all precautions should be taken when using any pesticide to be sure that children and pets do not have access to them. If the ants are coming in from outside then the area around the window, down the wall and about two or three feet of ground should be sprayed with a product such as Spectracide Triazicide, Ortho Home Defense System or Bayer Advanced Lawn and Garden Multi Insect Killer. A barrier around the house and a few feet up the wall with one of these products will stop the ants and most other insects. Sevin can be prepared and poured in the nest of the colony if it can be located.

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