

Adding Legumes To Your Pasture

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One of the best management practices that beef producers can use is the addition of legumes into their pastures. Legumes are helpful for a number of reasons. For example, a stand of 30 percent clover will provide all the nitrogen needed to allow the grass component to yield at its optimum. This saves the producer the cost of supplementing nitrogen. Legumes are also higher in protein and other minerals, thus providing a healthier diet which can lead to improved gains, improved body scores, and better rebreeding.

Legumes can also provide much needed forage during the summer months when grass growth slows. Having legumes can offset the summer slump of grasses which can allow animal numbers to be maintained. Since many pastures have fescue as the grass component, adding legumes can help offset the effects of fescue endophyte, which will reduce weight gain and conception rates. There really are not any negatives associated with including legumes in a pasture.

Frost seeding is the usual method that clover is introduced into pasture, and now is the time to consider that. The cost of clover seed is much cheaper than applying supplemental nitrogen to the pasture. Plus, you get the same result – more forage. Many producers who apply nitrogen in the spring are not getting the most for their dollars. Rarely do pastures need growth encouragement in the spring. Pastures are more often lacking in the summer, when growth slows down. It is during the summer when interseeded

legumes can really provide a benefit.

The usual recommendation has been to frost seed 3 to 4 pounds of inoculated red clover each year, 6 to 8 pounds every other year, or 1 to 2 pounds of improved white or ladino clover. The white and ladino should last much longer than the red, so annual reseeding should not be necessary once they become established, although they will not persist indefinitely. The past few years' excessive rains have been hard on legumes. Cattle traffic on excessively wet pastures has not improved legume stand either. In some cases, most legumes have been lost in pastures. So many pastures probably need some improvement, and legumes should be one of the first considerations.

Success of frost seeding of legumes can be increased if the pasture has some bare soil showing. The seed needs to land on bare soil so that the freezing and thawing of the soil incorporates the seed. So the more "abused" the pasture is, the better the establishment. Also, since the grass stand is mature and has a good root system, it can really out-compete the just-seeded legume. So try and give the legume as much help as possible. You might consider heavily grazing fescue pastures now to eliminate top growth and leave some bare soil.

Do not fertilize with nitrogen, as you will only encourage the grass. Remove the cattle off the pasture if the grass stand is really short when the legume emerges. Remember that continuous grazing will prevent the clover from maintaining, so be sure to allow 30 days between grazings. Δ