Arkansas Livestock Producers Hope To Capitalize On Lower Temps, Rain

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Arkansas farms that rely on pastures are playing "beat the clock" to get the ground fertilized and allow them to capitalize on fall's rain and cooler temperatures.

Pastures need to be worked now if they "are going to get seeded and grow anything before a hard freeze," said Robert Seay, Benton County Extension staff chair for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. "Typically here, in northwest Arkansas, mid-October is the standard shutoff date for seeding, though sometimes that can continue to Nov. 2 or even mid-November with mild conditions."

One obstacle for some in northwest Arkansas is finding grain drills to get wheat and other seed in the ground for grazing.

"We don't have enough grain drills," Seay said. "The conservation district has two, and in most years, people start booking them in August. There's a waiting list a mile long."

John Jennings, professor-forage for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, said the weekend rain brought 1.6 inches around Conway, near the center of the state.

"With the approaching cooler temperatures, that amount of rain will last longer than it would have a month ago," he said. "It will help the germination of any volunteer ryegrass or winter annuals already planted and should start stimulating the growth of fescue for fall pasture."

"Winter annuals can be planted 'til early November, but earlier planting could provide earlier grazing," Jennings said. "For fall and winter grazing, the annuals need to be fertilized soon after emergence this fall to stimulate growth. Unfertilized annuals will not be productive until spring. Fescue can still be fertilized for fall and winter grazing if done ASAP."

In the southwestern part of the state, where drought has persisted longest, Lafayette County Extension Staff Chair Joe Vestal is urging cattle producers to test corn and milo stalks for nitrates before feeding it to cattle. Where hay is in short supply, such as Texas and Oklahoma, many livestock producers are resorting to crop residue.

"Nitrate can be a problem in corn and milo stalks that were heavily fertilized with nitrogen and went through drought stress," he said. "I've had about 25 percent of samples sent to the lab come back over 2,100 parts per million, which can be lethal to cattle."

Vestal and Jennings advised that livestock producers be sure to check with the crop grower to find out what, if any, chemical residues might be left on the stalks.

Arkansas hay producers database is online at http://hayproducers.uaex.edu/. Δ