

Extension Specialist Offers “Top 5 Forage Tips For 2008”

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

Jay Chism, agronomy specialist with University of Missouri Extension, says his top five forage tips for 2008 can be summed up with one statement: don't waste nitrogen fertilizer.

“Nitrogen is expensive; and it is hard to justify the cost per acre, especially if the beef market happens to take a downturn sometime during the year,” said Chism.

Here are Chism's top five tips.

SOIL TEST, DON'T GUESS

“If you are not soil testing and following recommendations from a soil testing lab, you really are just guessing,” said Chism.

Sampling and following MU fertility guidelines is one of the best investments forage producers can make. A soil test report will also provide lime requirements for the forages selected. A proper pH will improve the efficiency of nutrients applied to the crop.

“Applying fertilizer without testing and thinking about yield goals is definitely going to waste nitrogen fertilizer,” said Chism.

FROST SEED LEGUMES

Most cattle producers know legumes add forage quality to cool-season grass pastures. Spending a little money on clover seed in the spring is an investment and will pay off according to Chism.

Research shows that total yield, quality and conception rates are all improved if legumes are added to grass pasture. The real bonus is that legumes will fix free nitrogen and make the nutrient available to grass plants that share the same area of the pasture.

“If you are not adding nitrogen fixing legumes to your pasture, you may be wasting nitrogen fertilizer you could be getting for free,” said Chism.

MANAGE YOUR GRAZING SYSTEM

Research has shown that managed intensive grazing systems can improve forage utilization from 35 percent to as much as 75 percent when compared to open or traditional grazing systems.

“Not getting the most out of the forages you have spent valuable resources on is definitely wasting nitrogen fertilizer. If you are spending

the money to grow the crop, use a system that will make the most of that investment,” said Chism.

An additional benefit of a good grazing system is evenly distributed manure that helps maintain phosphorus and potassium levels throughout paddocks. Information about grazing systems is available at county MU Extension offices, as well as, the Natural Resource Conservation Office.

LIMIT SPRING NITROGEN

Proper nitrogen fertilizer applied in the spring will give any pasture a real jump and will grow abundant forage for livestock. But can you really use all that forage?

Many times stocking rates are not at levels where grasses can be grazed before they begin to go into the reproductive stage. Once a grass begins to develop a seed head the quality of the forage, and the quality of the hay, goes down according to Chism.

“Why purchase nitrogen fertilizer and then produce a poor quality feed? Nitrogen only needs to be applied when extra forage is needed, so use it sparingly,” said Chism.

APPLY NITROGEN IN LATE SUMMER

Apply 40 to 60 pounds of nitrogen per acre around the second week of August. Although total forage production is not as high as a spring application of fertilizer, late summer applied nitrogen is a good way to get the most benefit from a nitrogen purchase.

“Research has shown that in most seasons this application is a good way to stockpile fescue that can extend late fall and winter grazing. Stockpiled fescue is good quality, inexpensive feed for beef cattle,” said Chism.

If fescue is strip grazed, forage use is maximized and that helps increase the value to livestock producers.

MORE INFORMATION

Many MU Extension guide sheets related to fescue and nitrogen use can be found at the local MU Extension Center or online at extension.missouri.edu.

For more information contact Chism at (417) 682-3579. △