

# Legumes Can Aid Nitrogen Management In Forages

**SPRINGFIELD, MO.**

**T**he high cost of fertilizer has caused many farmers to take a second look at how they spend their fertilizer dollar.

Still, the use of fertilizer continues to be important to continue productivity of cropland, hayfields and pastures according to Tim Schnakenberg, agronomy specialist with MU Extension headquartered in Galena.

Crops and hayfields are especially at risk if fertilizer applications are limited or eliminated. Pastures are not quite as at risk if a good rotational grazing strategy is implemented.

“Many livestock and hay producers are re-thinking the need this year to grow their own nitrogen,” said Schnakenberg. “This can be done by the use of legumes such as clover that will fix its own nitrogen from the atmosphere.”

Legumes can produce 50 to 300 pounds of nitrogen per acre which can be gradually available to pastures and hayfields.

Legumes will not only produce its own nitrogen but improve forage quality leading to better

livestock performance. This is a cheap fertilizer source compared to commercial nitrogen.

“There is still a narrow window of opportunity to overseed clovers. Successful establishment for overseeding is best made in February but this can be extended into March depending on weather conditions,” said Schnakenberg.

Lespedeza can be sown later than clover but it will not produce as much nitrogen.

Schnakenberg warns that successful clover establishment and maintenance is dependent on the use of an inoculant at planting. Good soil fertility including a higher pH and phosphorus level is also important.

Lespedeza is less dependent high fertility conditions.

For more information contact the nearest MU Extension Center. The following University of Missouri Extension agronomy specialists can also help: Schnakenberg at (417) 357-6812, Tom Hansen at (417) 862-9284 or Jay Chism at (417) 682-3579. Δ