

Mostly Quiet – Well For The Moment



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Although we have seen an abundance of rain this year the weather has finally begun to cooperate, especially when compared to last year's drought and what is currently occurring in the southern Plains. The moderate temperatures and clear skies will provide cattlemen with the opportunity to catch up on chores.

For most of us it has been a trying year while harvesting hay; I have seen numerous cut hay fields that were rained on. It is important to remember that even a slight amount of rain on curing hay can cause serious losses of feed quality. The losses occur because much of the nutrition in the plant is water soluble and can be removed by leaching.

In addition, keep in mind that key environmental factors like temperature and soil moisture status cannot be disregarded when trying to explain or predict forage quality characteristics. Making a prediction of forage quality based solely on morphological stage often is erroneous when confounding environmental conditions exist. These environmental factors are interactive. For example, the ideal growing conditions from the standpoint of forage quality impact of dry conditions would be negated by high temperatures during a hot drought when forage quality drops fast and maturity accelerates.

Due to weather volatility during hay production this year one may want to have the nutritive value of the hay determined prior to feeding. Testing forage quality is a valuable management tool that can assist in formulating nutritionally balanced rations resulting in a more predictable animal response, minimizing waste, and evaluation of forage management practices (growing, harvesting, and storage).

The copious rain has also hindered pasture weed management; pasture mowing and spraying has been delayed several times. I have walked through several pastures in the last couple of months. Overall one could not tell that we experienced a drought last year. Nevertheless there were still patches of weeds and some were poisonous.

There are numerous weeds that are poisonous to livestock, but the potential for livestock poisoning depends on the availability and quantity of the poisonous plant, the stage of plant growth, the time of year, and the kind of animal.

Also in those fields were patches of thistles. It is important to identify whether they are either perennial or biennial and then decide on a management plan. Thistle management will combine various cultural, mechanical, and chemical measures.

Perennial thistles should be treated by a translocated herbicide while in the bud-to-early flower stage or in the fall regrowth stage. At this

stage, the herbicide can move downward with food reserves to the roots, thus killing the entire plant.

Biennials, like musk, plumeless, and bull thistle, live for two years and reproduce only by seed. They form a rosette (a flat group of leaves at ground level) and store food in their roots the first year and flower (produce seed) the second year. Control measures for biennial thistles, chemical or mechanical, are most effective when applied during the first year's growth. If treatment is delayed until the second year, early season application of herbicide before bloom is important. In most cases you will have both years present in your pasture.

It may be prudent to take time to check pastures and identify any weed problems then decide on how to best manage the weeds. Not controlling the weeds early will take away from pasture forage quality ultimately affecting cattle productivity.

If you plan to mow your pastures and you are behind on hay production, you may want to consider harvesting the pasture forage for hay; poorer quality hay is better than "snowballs" especially when the cattle are supplemented appropriately.

Until pasture management is back on track, do not forget to watch for pink eye. I have seen several calves with pink eye which can cause weight loss of up to one half pound per day.

Pink eye is caused by the *Moraxella bovis* bacteria. The surface of the bacteria is covered by hair-like structures known as pili, which attach or adhere to the conjunctiva or the cornea. Adhesion prevents the bacteria from being washed away by tears and blinking. Other bacteria and viruses can produce the red and swollen eyelids or conjunctivae without the involvement of the cornea that is typical of pinkeye.

There are several factors that predispose cattle to contract pink eye. Unpigmented eyelids and white hair on the face do not absorb ultraviolet light, which in turn increases the susceptibility of the calf to *M. bovis*. Another factor that increases the susceptibility of the calf to *M. bovis* is irritation of the eye by dust or plant material from mature, unmowed pastures. Face flies can carry the bacteria from one calf to another, but they are only one way the outbreak is spread. Pinkeye outbreaks occurred long before face flies became a problem. Poor herd immunity results in a greater number of animals shedding *M. bovis*, thereby increasing the level of exposure of calves.

Although many cattlemen may be behind on chores due to rain, it is still important to observe your cattle. Cattle production and management is the culmination of numerous decisions. Producers should begin planning as soon as possible – it is much cheaper and easier than treating problems. Δ

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