

Order Summer Forage Seed Early

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Arkansas cattle producers are being urged to buy early after last year's drought caused shortfall of seed for summer forages such as sorghum, sudangrass, millet and crabgrass, said John Jennings, professor-forage specialist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

"Much of the sorghum, millet, and crabgrass seed is produced in Kansas, Oklahoma, and parts of the southwest where drought has been severe the past two years," he said. "This has caused low seed production of those forages."

"Producers intending to use these forages should purchase seed early before supplies are gone," he said. "Red River crabgrass seed is already sold out for the year. Sorghum and millet supply of certain varieties is somewhat better than last year, but as current inventory is sold, price will increase for any remaining supplies."

For Arkansas ranchers who saw their pastures and hay meadows cut down by drought in 2011 and 2012, summer annual forages make excellent renovation crops to prepare damaged fields for replanting other perennial forages, Jennings said.

Planting season nears

Planting time for warm-season grasses is just around the corner.

Crabgrass should be planted in April to mid-May at a rate of 3-5 pounds per acre.

"Higher rates produce quicker sod cover and shallow planting is best," Jennings said. "Time from emergence – not day of planting – to first grazing of properly planted stands is about 40 days."

Crabgrass is sensitive to close grazing. Grazing heights should be maintained above 4 inches for best re-growth. Crabgrass maintains quality over a wide range of maturity much better than bermudagrass and can produce good animal performance in grazing systems. Crabgrass makes good quality hay, but is very difficult to cure for baling due to its "hairy" leaves and stems.

Millet and sorghum/sudangrass should be planted when soil temperatures reach 65 degrees Fahrenheit, usually early to mid-May. Planting can extend into early June if there's enough soil moisture.

"Harvest can be expected about six weeks after planting in good conditions," he said. "Cutting or grazing to leave a stubble of 8 inches will

result in quicker re-growth and possibly an extra harvest. Earlier plantings can yield two to three harvests."

Seeding rate is 25 pounds per acre.

"These forages tiller well so higher seeding rates are not necessary," he said. "Plant seed at one-half to 1 inch deep. Planting on a tilled seedbed is best. If no-till planting, use herbicide to suppress the sod before planting."

Drilling into fescue sod without any sod suppression is only moderately successful – maybe one or two years out of five. A thin stand of rows with long skips usually results from this practice.

Grazing can begin when these forage reach 24 inches. Hay should be harvested at 30 to 40 inches in height. Hay harvested when plants are mature, at 6 feet and more, is low quality and very difficult to cure for baling.

Prussic acid is a concern when grazing sorghum/sudangrass. This forage should be at least 18 inches before grazing and should not be grazed when wilted from drought or frost. Δ



Crabgrass may be a problem for homeowners, but it's a desired summer forage on cattle operations.

U of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture file photo courtesy John Jennings

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