

# Perfect Fall Conditions To Establish Pastures And Hayfields

LEXINGTON, KY.

Cool temperatures and abundant rainfall have created ideal conditions for forage producers to establish or thicken grass pastures and hayfields.

"The continuous rainfall this summer was very good for forage growth, and soil moisture levels are ideal across most of the state," said Ray Smith, forage extension specialist in the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture.

These conditions are welcome news for many forage producers. The droughts of 2007 and 2008 made it difficult to establish new stands of cool-season grasses, such as orchardgrass, tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass.

Producers who want to establish forages this fall should do so as soon as possible, Smith said. Ideal seeding dates for cool-season grasses are between Sept. 1 and Sept. 15, as this gives the new forage stand enough time to get established before the first frost.

Soil testing is extremely important before seeding. It allows producers to know the nutrient content of their fields and may save them money on unnecessary fertilizer applications. UK provides soil testing services. Producers can submit soil samples to UK through their county agent.

Producers need good weed control before seeding. Mowing or grazing will help control competitive summer annual weeds. When completely re-establishing a new pasture or field, it is important to use one or more applications of a herbicide containing glyphosate to kill the existing field. If the goal is simply to thicken an existing pasture or field, then the producer can

spray a broadleaf herbicide to kill weeds. In either case, producers should follow the instructions on the herbicide label or recommendations in UK publication AGR-172 to allow enough time between the application and seeding. As a general rule, make herbicide applications when daytime temperatures are above 60 degrees.

Tilling the seedbed is the most effective establishment method, but sod seeding using a no-till drill is preferred on sloped ground. Planting seeds too deeply is one of the most common causes of stand failure. Producers should plant forage grasses and legumes no deeper than one-fourth to one-half inch.

It is important to plant an adequate amount of seeds. The best way to ensure this is to plant the highest recommended seeding rate. For example, if AGR-18, "Forage and Crop Seeding Guide," recommends 15 to 20 pounds per acre, then 20 pounds is best. While high seeding rates is a costly initial investment, low yields and weedy fields caused by thin stands will cost producers more money in the long run, Smith said.

It can take up to a year to fully establish new grass stands, but a good rule of thumb is to refrain from grazing or cutting until next spring. Then when cattle are turned into the field graze lightly the first few rotations and provide a good rest period between grazing or hay harvests.

More information on pasture and hayfield establishment is available through publications located on the UK forage Web site at <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage>. Δ



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