

# Prepare Pastures Now To Meet Winter Feed Needs

**PINE BLUFF, ARK.**

**W**ith midsummer temperatures at record highs, few cattlemen are thinking of feeding hay in the winter. But, now (mid-July) is the time to begin managing forages to reduce winter hay needs, says Dr. David Fernandez, Cooperative Extension Program livestock specialist at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB).

Stockpiling bermudagrass or fescue for winter grazing and adding winter annuals to pastures can reduce feed costs, labor needs and improve soil fertility. Begin stockpiling bermudagrass by grazing or cutting the pasture to a height of 2 to 4 inches, says Dr. Fernandez. Then, apply 50 pounds to 60 pounds of nitrogen by mid-August and allow the pasture to grow ungrazed until October. This ensures sufficient growth for winter use.

Tall fescue can produce a great deal of forage in the fall, more than annual rye or small grains. And, that forage maintains its quality throughout the winter grazing period, says Dr. Fernandez.

Research conducted as part of the Arkansas Beef Improvement Program found a cost savings of \$14 per cow on stockpiled fescue. To stockpile fescue, Dr. Fernandez advises clearing the old spring growth/summer residue by mid-August and fertilizing according to soil needs (usually about 50 pounds to 60 pounds of nitrogen per acre) in mid-September to take advantage of Fall rains. Begin grazing the stockpiled fescue in December.

Stockpiled forages last longer with strip or rotational grazing. With unrestricted grazing, cattle consume only about 35 percent of available forage as compared to 65 percent with strip

grazing.

One way to encourage strip or rotational grazing is with an electric fence. Temporary electric fencing can be as simple as a single electrified wire on fiberglass poles and can keep cattle from all but a narrow strip of stockpiled forage. This also provides a more even distribution of manure and urine to replenish soil fertility.

As the forage is consumed, move the fencing for access to a fresh strip for grazing. Start grazing near the water source to minimize damage from trampling. "Because the forage is dormant, there is no need to exclude cattle from previously grazed strips," says Dr. Fernandez.

While cattle are eating stockpiled forages, plant winter annuals such as winter wheat, annual ryegrass or other cereal grains on pastures just vacated. Allow cows to eat the pasture down to 2 inches just as the grass goes dormant or clip the pasture.

No-till winter annuals beginning as early as mid-to-late August until early to mid-October with the later beginning and ending dates applying to southern vs. northern Arkansas. Winter annuals can provide early spring grazing into early summer. Manage annual ryegrass carefully or its long growing season may reduce yields of warm season perennials, such as bermudagrass or Bahia grass.

Combining stockpiled forages with winter annuals should reduce winter feed costs and hay needs dramatically while improving cow performance. Dr. Fernandez warns that some winter annuals can provide so much quality nutrition that cows may actually come into the calving season with excessive body condition so their access to the pasture may have to be limited to prevent calving problems. Δ