

Rebuilding A Forage Base Has Variables To MU Extension Specialist

LAMAR, MO.

Landowners experienced a terrible drought this past summer and many are wondering what to do now with the poor pasture that is left.

“There are two responses to have toward a drought: short term and long term,” said Jill Scheidt, agronomy specialist with the University of Missouri Extension in Barton County.

A short-term response refers emergency crops to plant to address a drought now. This spring, short-term planting options as an emergency crop include spring oats, cereal rye or turnips.

Long-term response options for drought are available in plantings like: over-seeding clover or lespedeza; thickening a forage stand in the spring; planting annual Sudan or millet in May; partially converting to a warm season grass pasture; controlled grazing; and meeting fertility needs.

“To get back on track with a forage program a forage base needs to be established for the next season. If starting from a strong fescue base, 40 to 60 lbs. /ac of nitrogen needs to be applied in the fall and clover no-tilled into the ground no later than September 1,” said Scheidt.

Another option is frost-seeding clover or lespedeza from December to February.

“If starting from a weak fescue base, frost seeding clover or lespedeza is still a good option,” said Scheidt. “Clover and legume stands suffer in a drought, so it is imperative to rebuild a lost stand.”

SEVERE INJURY

If the drought severely injured a fescue field infested with toxic endophyte, then the drought gives producers a chance convert fields over to Novel endophyte fescues.

“Converting fields to Novel endophyte fescue is the best option if a pasture is injured beyond repair,” said Scheidt.

Legumes are an excellent addition to a pasture. Not only do legumes fix nitrogen, but they also provide additional benefits like: increase animal gain by 100 lbs. /ac; increase daily gains

0.1-1.0 lbs.; increase cow conception rates by 15-25 percent; increase forage quality; lower endophyte toxicity; and even out feed supply.

Another way to get better usage of a pasture is adding warm season grasses to the mix. Converting 10-30 percent of the pasture to warm season grasses such as Bermuda, Caucasian bluestem, or native warm season grasses provides pastures with lush, growing grass during months when fescue growth begins to decline.

BEST TO NO-TILL

According to Scheidt, it is best to no-till grass seeds into an existing sod.

“No-tilling is the best option because it maintains the original sod, conserves moisture, provides competition to weeds and protects against erosion better than conventional tillage. One downside to no-till is the risk of not controlling planting depth,” said Scheidt.

Grass seedlings need to be planted no more than 1/8-1/4 inch deep. If the drill does not provide good depth control, broadcasting is a more successful option.

HERBICIDE USE

Removal of competitive weeds is important when re-establishing a pasture. Just be sure to always read the herbicide label to determine when seedlings can safely be planted after an application.

A bio essay is a great way to test whether herbicide residue is still in the soil. A bio essay is performed by taking 5-8 samples of soil and planting seeds into those samples. If grasses emerge in 7-14 days, it is safe to plant; if not, wait a while then do another bio essay trial.

Pasture rationing is also essential in a drought. The more often livestock are rotated, the more recovery time grass has in between grazing periods.

“Different types of rotational grazing are available. No one pasture is the same; trial and error is the best way to figure how often to move fences or switch paddocks for optimum grass usage in your pasture,” said Scheidt. Δ

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