

Thin Fescue And Tight Hay Supplies Have Producers Asking About Fall Grazing Options

GALENA, MO.

The dry weather this summer has put a strain on many fescue pastures in southwest Missouri according to Tim Schnakenberg, agronomy specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

"Many fields are recovering with recent rains, though some may come back with a thinner stand," said Schnakenberg. "Related to this problem is the fact that hay supplies are tight and livestock producers are wondering if they will have enough feed to get them through the winter."

In fields that have a good stand of fescue, Schnakenberg recommends applying 40 to 50 pounds of nitrogen per acre in August.

"After topdressing pastures, then closing gates until November or December, producers will extend their grazing season and save considerably on hay costs. This practice really pays off in years of a short hay supply, particularly if they ration the forage in a managed grazing system," said Schnakenberg.

Adding a cereal crop to this scenario may increase tonnage slightly but the competition to these two species in the same field defeats the purpose, particularly if the landowner still has a strong fescue stand.

However, if the fescue stand is not up to par, it could merit no-tilling wheat, triticale or rye to increase tonnage. Schnakenberg recommends cereal rye for quick fall forage, though he concedes that the quality drops more quickly.

"Wheat is best for spring forage and the quality is generally higher. Triticale ranks between the two in quality and tonnage. There are many good forage-type varieties of these on the market," said Schnakenberg.

Another option that may give more long-term benefit to pastures is adding no-till annual rye-

grass to make a better long-term supplement for fescue.

"It will compliment the fescue and will last later into next summer than the cereal grains and drop seed for subsequent years. It dilutes the endophyte down and improves overall pasture quality," said Schnakenberg.

Ryegrass can be no-tilled by itself into a fescue stand or some producers may want to mix it 50/50 with fescue seed to thicken the stand. If a producer wants the ryegrass to come back in later years, it should only be used in a grazing scenario.

"Rye will likely not persist in a hay field that is normally harvested before the seed is viable," said Schnakenberg.

One other option is to plant turnips or a combination of turnips and a cereal grain into a poor stand of fescue pasture. Turnips are relatively inexpensive, providing quick high quality grazing on in the fall.

"Turnips do best if planted in August, though some will sow a cereal grain with it which will be challenging this early," said Schnakenberg. "Turnips are a short-term feed source so a plan should be in place for longer-term forage development in the pasture."

If farmers plan to make these stand improvements, Schnakenberg says they should prepare immediately to no-till them into the stand.

For forages such as fescue, annual ryegrass and orchardgrass, seeding could occur late August through mid-September, depending on weather conditions. An annual cereal crop such as wheat, triticale and rye should be established after Sept. 15.

"Many Soil and Water Conservation Districts rent no-till drills to the public. Be sure to soil test to insure adequate fertility for establishment," said Schnakenberg. Δ



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