

Too Much Of A Good Thing Can Cause Problems In Cattle

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

The 2008 growing season has been exceptional for forage growth in southwest Missouri. This includes cool and warm season grasses, legumes and weeds.

Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri, says the abundance of rain really made it a legume year to remember. Legumes, especially ladino and alfalfa, are good additions to pastures, but they do pose a bloat risk.

The ideal blend of legumes with cool season grass, usually fescue, is around one-third legume and two-thirds grass.

"This past grazing season some farmers say the percentage legume is well over 50 percent. For some, it is even approaching 75 percent. That heightens the risk for bloat, especially when it peaks for lushness," said Cole.

Cole says he has had very few reports of bloat this season, but points out there could be another problem related to pregnancy status in

beef cows.

"Legumes can contain varying amounts of plant estrogens and may occasionally have an adverse affect on cows and heifers prior to breeding," said Cole.

If the cows are grazing a dense stand of clover or alfalfa while breeding, or even up to a week following breeding, the high level of protein may inhibit implantation of the embryo in the uterus and the cow simply returns to heat according to Cole.

"As with the bloat risk, this probably doesn't occur frequently, but should you have an abundance of red or ladino clover you're grazing this fall and the cows are returning to heat, this could be one possible cause," said Cole.

Cattle producers should also pay close attention to cows early in the breeding season for those cycling each 18 to 21 days.

"It could be a bull problem, but might also be something out of the ordinary like too much legume in the pasture," said Cole. △