

Grazing Bites

August 2013

Victor Shelton, NRCS State Agronomist/Grazing Specialist



This summer is passing by fairly quickly and I believe I lost at least one month back there somewhere. I consider August a prep month for the beginnings of fall activities starting with the seeding of permanent vegetation, early planting of annuals for grazing/haying and getting ready for any cover crop/annuals being planted for grazing on cropland after row crops are harvested.

For at least most of the state, we have some pretty nice conditions going into our fall planting season. It is certainly quite a bit different than last year at this time. Even temperatures are nothing to complain about, though the corn would probably appreciate a little more heat. I think it was 2009 the last time we had a slightly cool period late July and into early August which makes for better State Fair weather for both livestock and people.

Early rumors suggested that some seed this fall might be a little on the short side, especially some cover crop seed. Right now, it does not seem to be a problem, but I would not wait until the last minute to buy it either. Early August to mid-September is an excellent time to plant cool-season grasses to get enough good growth on them to guarantee them to survive the coming winter months. One of the advantages of seeding this time of the year is lower competition from weeds as compared to a spring seeding. If you happen to be in one of the drier areas then you still have time for that to improve and the seed in the fall generally waits on the rain. Later plantings (generally after September 15th) can work some years but are little more precarious in results. If you are waiting for a row crop to be harvested prior to seeding, then time is not always on your side depending on the harvest date (which may be slightly later this year according to planting dates). Tall fescues and Timothy probably handle being seeded the latest, but may require a nurse crop, such as wheat or oats to survive over winter.

Shop and choose a high quality seed, named varieties and from reputable companies. Do the math and seed at pure live seed (PLS) rates. Take the amount of seed needed (4 lbs./Ac PLS) and divide it by (percent purity x percent germination). $4 \text{ lbs.} \div (.95 \times .80) = 5.26$ pounds of seed needed per acre. You can do the same calculation and compare prices by dividing the price of the seed per pound by the PLS percent and see what the true cost is of the seed. \$1.20 per pound seed at the previous PLS rate is actually about \$1.58 per pound ($\$1.20 / (.95 \times .80)$). Compare that price to some of the seed on sale, always checking the seed tag and testing date. A bargain is not always a bargain. Do the math. I actually like seed grown the previous year, not the same year; it normally has less dormant seed.

In many cases, you just can't beat a tall cool season grass for quality and yield. I certainly favor late maturing orchardgrass varieties which do a pretty good job of delaying seed head development as compared to earlier "hay type" varieties such as Potomac. If you are adding to an existing alfalfa field, a late maturing orchardgrass works quite well for this purpose and is best seeded at about 6-8 pounds per acre with a no-till drill. Inter-seeding alfalfa into alfalfa does not work because of auto-toxic compounds present in the older established plants.

The improved varieties of tall fescues should also be considered. They are not like Kentucky 31, with its associated negative endophyte problems, but rather either very low endophyte or are endophyte-friendly. The novel endophyte-friendly tall fescue is just as vigorous and high yielding, if not higher, than old Kentucky 31, but does not have the problems caused by the alkaloids associated with the endophyte fungus in Kentucky 31.

The forages you chose to plant should match the field conditions, including soils they will be grown in, plant hardiness zone, to what degree they will be managed (some certainly take more management than others), the livestock requirements that will be consuming it, and the use: grazing, haying, stockpiling, etc. Some livestock are more sensitive to certain forages than others; brood mares and endophyte-infected tall fescue and alpacas and perennial ryegrass are a couple of examples. If you are not sure what to plant, consult your local forage expert (NRCS, Purdue Extension, etc.).

This fall, or at least it appears so at this point in time, should yield to grand opportunities for stockpiling forage for late fall and winter grazing better than we have seen for a few years. Start thinking about what paddocks will make good winter stockpile and have accessible water during the winter months. Paddocks that are being utilized right now should have livestock removed in a timely manner and leave adequate live plant growth behind. The longer the rest period you have in the fall, the more potential growth and stockpile. With opportunities of annuals to graze, and later corn stalks and or corn stalks with winter annuals planted into them, you will get the chance to rest more pastures, for longer periods, with increasing potential to graze even longer later on.

There will be several people that will think that that fall regrowth might look better rolled up as a bale of hay, but really, is it going to go anywhere if you don't? It is almost always more economically feasible to graze rather than to bale it. It is kind of like the guy that puts all of his cows in the barn lot in late May and feeds them hay while cutting the entire farm for hay... and until some of it grows back. The cows have four feet, a built-in harvester and a fertilizer spreader... let them do more of the work! There is plenty to do without adding more work. I have often heard people talk about the lazy days of summer... who really has those? As always, keep on grazing!

Reminders & Opportunities!

Purdue Forage Management Day – September 5th, 2013, Purdue Agronomy Farm DTC.

Heart of America Grazing Conference – January 20-21, 2014, Columbus, IN

Southern Indiana Grazing Conference – February 5th, 2014, Odon, IN – Jim Gerrish and Kathy Voth are main speakers.

Northern Indiana Grazing Conference – February 7-8, 2014 - Michiana Event Center, Howe, IN.

Stay tuned for more information along with other workshops and field days.