Forage Management Strategies for the Grazing and Hay Harvesting Season

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During this time of year as the weather warms and grass begins to grow livestock producers need to begin thinking about the grazing and hay harvesting season. Producers can implement some practices to improve forage production as well as livestock performance for the season ahead.

- Nitrogen fertilizer should be applied now to benefit hay fields. The UT recommendation is to apply 60 pounds of nitrogen fertilizer per acre. If using ammonium nitrate that would be about 175 pounds of fertilizer or about 150 pounds of urea fertilizer per acre. A 30 pound application of nitrogen can improve pastures as well.
- A 2,4-D application at two pints per acre applied right now can reduce the yellow field buttercup we normally see in mid to late April. Once buttercup blooms control is greatly reduced.
- Cattle producers need to use a high mag mineral to prevent issues with grass tetany. Grass tetany is a highly fatal disease associated with low levels of magnesium (Mg) in the blood. Grass tetany results from cattle consuming fast growing grasses that are full of moisture but may be diluted of efficient nutrients.
- Grass hay should be harvested at boot stage which is defined by seed head emergence in cool season grasses such as tall fescue. Grass in early boot stage will contain its highest levels of crude protein and total digestible nutrients which translates into hay quality. A forage analysis or forage test will determine the exact quality of the hay which will be very valuable when feeding livestock.
- Warm season grasses such as sorghum hybrids, sudangrass and others can be established in fields that have seen a loss of grass and/or increased weed pressure. These grasses can be harvested for hay or grazed throughout the summer with proper management.
- Fields having weed pressure need to be evaluated to determine if a herbicide application is needed. Producers should scout these fields and identify what weeds are present and then select the best herbicide to use.

For more information on these practices contact the Extension Office at 931-363-3523, extension 106 or klrose@utk.edu.