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Fall Forage Management

With grass still green and growing, it's a little hard to think about forage dormancy, but like it or not – it's on the horizon! That means evaluation of this season and a look ahead to next.

One of the challenges forage growers face is balancing effective utilization of the standing forage they have before it goes dormant and making sure they don't over use it! The balance can be a fine line!

Do a quick evaluation now to see just how much growth you have out there. Cool season grass needs to keep three to four inches of growth on it this time of year so that adequate photosynthesis can occur to continue to replenish the plant's root system. That may mean four to six weeks of some level of rest for those forages so they can recuperate. Warm season grasses would do better to have six to eight inches of growth.

So what happens if you don't? Well, maybe you'll get by – and maybe you'll suffer! If the pasture or hay field has been kept in pretty good shape – not overgrazed, appropriately fertilized, appropriate 'open space' in the leaf canopy – then you may be just fine with going in to fall with the forage being a little shorter. It may have plenty of root system to provide nutrients to make it through the fall as well as come back in good shape next spring. For most growers, that simply isn't the case! Dry periods in the summer almost always put our forages under stress. This year, standing water reduced some stands and fertility issues continue to plague many of our cool season forage stands.

That means taking a good hard look right now. If the pasture needs rest, do your best to offer it. The resulting regrowth can help increase root mass and tillering that over time can help to increase production, vigor, and early spring green up. If you want to help it out a little, you may even consider a light application of fertilizer or at the very least taking a soil sample to make sure you are balancing nutrient needs for next spring. Warm season forages don't respond to fertilizer, so rest is your option.

At the very least, take a little time now to evaluate your forage system. Implementing some changes now may have more effect than you think!

Lawn Seeding Deadline Nears

If you are going to be seeding a lawn, the time is now!

September is the best month to reseed cool-season lawns such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass, though you might be okay in to mid-October for tall fescue. Mid-October is also generally considered the last day for safely planting or overseeding a tall fescue lawn in the fall. Late seeding will require special care to not allow plants to dry out. Anything that slows growth will make it less likely that plants will mature enough to survive the winter.

Seeding done after the cut-off date can be successful, but the success rate goes down the later the planting date. Late plantings that fail are usually not killed by cold temperatures but rather desiccation. The freezing and thawing of soils heave poorly rooted grass plants out of the ground, which then dry and die. Keeping plants watered will help maximize root growth before freezing weather arrives.