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Grazing Plans

I always hesitate a little when questioned about stocking rates. Sure, we've got averages, but it's a little more difficult to make a good recommendation on a rate without knowing more about what species are in the system, the type and size of the animal being grazed, etc... With weather a huge (less than controllable) factor in determining optimum stocking rate, there are a number of things we can do now to at least start fine tuning stocking rates.

Start with a determination of soil type. The NRCS Web Soil Survey has a Range Production tool based on soil type that can give you an idea as to what you can expect during a poor year, normal year, or good year, so you can see how stocking rates may vary due to weather. For example, analysis of an 80 acre tract of grass with three soil types estimated a range of 3000 to 6475 pounds of forage produced per acre. A simple average would be 4700 pounds per year. Looking more closely at the acreage comprising each soil types, however, the highest range covers less than two acres. The remaining 78 acres average 3200 pounds per year. Fine tuning a production estimate by soil type can really help determine the actual stocking rate.

Evaluate your fertility program. How long has it been since your last soil test? Have adequate nutrients been applied to maximize production? A balanced fertility program – including pH – is an important first step in helping you get the most out of grazing lands.

Determine the species available to graze. Knowing what you have for forage types gives you a leg up on what to expect for production. Cool season grass production is going to be maximized in April, May, and June. Warm season grass production will be higher in May, June, and July. Cool season grasses tend to have a higher carrying capacity than warm season species. Knowing the differences can help you manage your stocking and stand health.

Use this hay feeding season as a great time to start working on a grazing plan.

Germination Potential of Old Garden Seed

If last spring's wet weather resulted in some leftover seed, it's time to dig it out and see if it can still be used this year. Many seeds can be tested for germination very simply in the home.

Start by placing 10 seeds on a paper towel moistened with warm water. Cover with a second moistened towel. Roll up the towels and place inside a plastic bag with enough holes for air exchange but not so many that the towels dry quickly. Place the bag in a warm place (like the top of a refrigerator), adding warm water if the towels dry out. Count the number of seeds germinated after week one, and remove. Do the same after week two. Adding the two numbers together and multiplying by ten gives you a percent germination.

If seed has been stored in a cold, dark, dry location, most of it will still be good for about three years. Carrots are the exception, and will likely only last one to two years.

RSVP Reminder

Nutrient Management Meeting – January 23rd (Holton). RSVP by January 14th to 785-364-3329, extension 136.

KSU Soybean Mtg: January 22 (Atchison/Marysville). RSVP: <http://bit.ly/KSUSoybean>.

Farm Bill meetings: January 14/15/16 in Holton, Seneca, and Oskaloosa. Visit www.meadowlark.k-state.edu (events section) – or e-mail me at dhallaue@ksu.edu.