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After the Harvest – Hay Field Evaluations

With hay harvest winding down, it’s easy to get bales hauled away and forget about fields until we return to apply fertilizer for next year. With some of the production issues we saw in 2020, time spent on some post-harvest monitoring may be something to consider this year.

Ample moisture across much of the area has seen cool season stands green up. That’s good, particularly when it could have been slowed by recent temperatures (cool season grasses much prefer 75 degrees over 95 degrees…). Hay fields I’ve monitored for canopy cover have showed reduced growth as temperatures climbed, but post-harvest greenup helped considerably.

The combination of good moisture and open canopy created by haying have also given weeds an opportunity to return. Now is a good time to monitor weed pressure to determine if control programs are necessary. The dogbane species have really taken off again this season. If this is the first year you’ve had an issue, it may be a coincidence. If it’s a multiple year problem on the increase, it may be time to consider a control program. There are limited control products available for dogbane, with application to avoid damage to desired forages the key.

A lot can – and will – happen in the hay stand from now until fall dormancy. Armyworm invasions. Early freezes. Weed pressure. Too little moisture. All can affect the 2021 crop. All deserve attention now to help keep next year’s production up to par.

Brown Patch of Turfgrass

Warm night time temperatures plus ample moisture staying on turf leaves in to late morning has resulted in one of our most troublesome turf grass diseases: brown patch. As damaging as it looks, brown patch is primarily a leaf issue. When severe, however, it can affect lower leaf sheath and crown areas, killing plants.

When evaluating stands, be patient. Most stands recover, but it will likely take three weeks plus, and will be weather dependent (the pathogen persists indefinitely in the soil, with weather typically the controlling factor as to its presence and damage level). Dig up plant roots/crowns and dissect them to check out tissue before making an overseeding decision.

Cultural practices can help reduce issues with the pathogen. Only irrigate early in the morning to reduce the time leaf tissue remains wet and susceptible to infection. Don’t overfertilize, especially when the disease is active. When overseeding, don’t get carried away, leaving ‘room’ in the stand for air movement.

Fungicides are effective, but generally only recommended if you want to maintain a blemish free lawn and are willing to apply rather expensive preventative fungicide products. Products with the active ingredients triadimefon, propiconazole, and myclobutanil are what are typically available to homeowners (triadimefon can provide three to five weeks of protection versus closer to two weeks for the others). None of the products will cure an infection already present. They are preventative only, meaning for best results, applications need to start in mid-June and continue through August.

In most years, tall fescue lawns will recover from infections. With the severity of this year’s infections, overseeding may be necessary.