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Broomsedge Bluestem – Nothing New Under the Sun?

Andropogon virginicus, more commonly known as Broomsedge Bluestem, has become a huge nemesis of cool season grasslands across eastern Kansas. It's been frequently discussed in this space, and a literature search would suggest we aren't at all alone – but why?

The large geography over which it's found is likely the result of a combination of management and environment. References suggest Broomsedge isn't overly competitive, requiring open space for establishment. Even after it germinates, it might take a couple years before plants produce seed. Unfortunately, the state of many cool season (and some warm season/native) grass stands is such that open space *does* exist. Multiple dry falls plus long-term fertility deficiencies plus external factors (fall armyworm feeding, etc...) can individually thin stands but together create significant stand stress and openings for Broomsedge establishment.

What can we do in the near term? Make grass stands as competitive as possible. For cool season grass stands, that starts with a fertility program based on a soil test. Phosphorous and soil pH are often blamed – and rightfully so - but the need for Potassium has also increased. Don't have a soil test to guide your fertilizer applications? Reach out and we can discuss potential blends. Already fertilized? No problem. Set a reminder now to pull a post-harvest soil test and make a note of areas where Broomsedge seems to be on the increase. Whole farm sampling programs provide excellent information, but focused sampling programs can be valuable as well.

While fertility is also an issue in pastures, they have the benefit of nutrient cycling through the grazing animal to keep soil test levels from declining as quickly as they do in hay stands. In pastures, the largest contributor to broomsedge establishment is likely overgrazing. Make sure stocking rates are appropriate, leaving ample forage height for rapid grass recovery.

Former Director of the University of Tennessee Beef and Forage Center, Dr. Gary Bates said: *Remember that the broomsedge did not move into the field in one year, and you won't be able to outcompete it in one year. But a sustained approach over several years can help you solve this problem.* Fertility and grazing management likely worked hand in hand with factors we often can't control (weather, fall armyworm feeding, etc...) to get us here and while they'll also be the management factors we have to adjust to get out of it, there are other things we might try as well. They'll be the focus of future columns. In the meantime, if you aren't sure what broomsedge is or if you have it, drop me a line. Staying *ahead* of broomsedge should be the goal.