

POLK COUNTY GRAZIER

An eNewsletter brought to you by the Rich Mountain Conservation District

JUNE 21, 2021



Feed Your Pastures

Although it is common knowledge that pastures need fertilized periodically, many graziers do not understand the basics of fertilization and nutrient management. **First and foremost, we need to know that we are ultimately “grass farmers”.** No different than a row crop farmer grows a crop for harvest in the Arkansas Delta, we grow grass and other plants for harvest. Instead of using a combine and then storing our product in a silo to sell, we harvest and store our crop with livestock. Just like the row crop farmer must manage their fields for a bountiful harvest, we must manage our pasture fields for a bountiful harvest. Making sure our crop is fed is an important part of management.

Most soils in this area already have abundant amounts of nutrients and the atmosphere has lots of Nitrogen so why do we even need to add additional nutrients? Mainly for two reasons. First, the naturally occurring nutrients in the soil and atmosphere are in chemical forms that are unavailable to plants. Soil biological activity (such as bacteria and fungi) can convert some of these unavailable forms of these nutrients into plant available forms. This soil biological activity requires large amounts of organic matter (such as living or dead plant materials in the soil) to function properly. That's partly why plants growing in soils with high organic matter are still productive and don't need nutrients added. The second reason that we may need to add nutrients is that unlike the native grasses that settlers found in this area a couple hundred years ago, modern introduced grasses such as Bermuda grass and Fescue are much more productive and tend to deplete the soil of nutrients over time.

There are several options for improving the nutrients available to our pasture plants but generally we can 1> add nutrients in the form of supplements (such as commercial fertilizers, manures, or lime), 2> improve our soil biological activity to make natural nutrients more plant available, or 3> use a combination of option 1 and option 2. So, which option is the best? Well, as a great philosopher once said, “it depends”. But, for many reasons, letting your soils make “free” nutrients and only adding the supplements that are needed makes the most common sense.

- ⇒ supplemental nutrients normally cost money and reducing this input cost means more profitability to the grazer.
- ⇒ not only does organic matter in the soil make “free” fertilizer it also improves other soil qualities such as infiltration rates and water holding capacity. Basically, this means that rain can soak into the soil better which improves drought resistance.
- ⇒ supplemental nutrient applications have the potential to runoff and end up in our streams, rivers, and lakes. Since fertilizers make the grass grow in our pastures they also make plants (like algae) grow in our waters which is not good.
- ⇒ in the warm and moist (normally) climate that we live in, organic matter is depleted very quickly. That means that soil biological activity will probably not be able to produce all the needed nutrients as quickly as we need; so additional supplements may be needed. This is especially true for lime since it is often needed to neutralize our naturally acidic soils of the Ouachita Mountains.
- ⇒ legumes (such as clovers) make good forages for our livestock, reduce weed pressure, and also help to fix Nitrogen from the atmosphere to a plant available form. In most cases, having a mix of grasses with some legumes is a “no-brainer”.

So, where does a “grass farmer” start with nutrient management? Start by closing your gates so that you can begin rotational grazing. Allowing your pastures to rest is the best way to develop plant roots and add organic matter to your soil. It's also very important to get a soil sample so you know what nutrients are already available in your soil. Your local conservation district can help.

◆ **Rotational grazing and soil sampling will be discussed further in future articles.**

Free Online Pasture Seminars—This week is about Silvopasture

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Date	Time	Topic	Presenter
June 1, 2021	1:00 PM CST Only	Pasture Planting	Presenter: Clark Whitefield, AR NRCS, MW Area Grassland Specialist
June 8, 2021	1:00 PM CST Only	Part II: Grazing Mgmt Demonstration of Cereal Rye and Ryegrass	Presenter: Jeremy Huff, AR NRCS State Grazing Lands Specialist
June 15, 2021	1:00 PM & 7:00 PM CST	Tree Tank Installation	Presenter: Tony & Leona Leamon, NRCS Technician and DISTRICT Coordinator
June 22, 2021	1:00 PM CST Only	Silvopasture	Presenter: Josh Smith, AR NRCS Forester - South Area
June 29, 2021	1:00 PM & 7:00 PM CST	Economics of Grazing	Presenter: Wesley Tucker, Field Specialist in Ag Business, University of Missouri

You are invited to attend the weekly grazing training sessions by Jeremy Huff, the USDA/ NRCS state grazing specialist. He offers these training sessions as a Zoom meeting and the instructions for logging in are included in attached flyer. If you have the Zoom app on your phone you can just scan the QR code on the flyer. If you want to see it on your computer there is a link included in the attachment. Everyone is welcome to login and participate but please be sure to mute your device when you get logged in to reduce background noise.

The first couple of sessions for June have already occurred, but they are planned weekly for the rest of the month and hope-

fully next month. There are sessions normally every Tuesday, some at 1pm, some at 7pm, and some at both times so see the attached flyer.

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Did you Know?

- ⇒ White clover can add 75-150 lbs of plant available Nitrogen per acre to a pasture.