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Wilson County Agricultural Article from Ruth Correll, Agricultural Extension Agent

Improving a Weak Stand of Tall Fescue

I have had lots of questions regarding what to do about thin tall fescue pastures and hayfields. A thin stand of grass allows more weed pressure and reduces overall grass production. Thin grass stands can result in reduced stocking rates which leads to reduced animal production per acre.

Thin stands are the result of summer droughts in previous years, overgrazing, poor fertility and neglect. No amount of fertilizer will make up for a thin stand of grass. Without a good stand of plants, management becomes much more challenging. The problem that most people face is that the stand does not have enough plants to give the full yield, but it has enough plants that you hesitate to kill everything out and start over.

What you would like to do is add more plants to the stand without losing a production season. This is often hard to accomplish. There are enough open spots to let weeds get established, but not enough open spots to let tall fescue plants get established.

Here are two methods of trying to “bulk up” a stand of tall fescue. These methods should only be tried in the fall.

Method 1 - The “Chance for Success” Method - In this method, have the pasture or hayfield clipped of by late August. As soon as the fall rains start and the tall fescue plants that are present begin to grow, apply .75 to 1 pint per acre of paraquate or one quart of glyphosate. The next day, use a no-till drill and seed 15 lb of tall fescue. The low rates of herbicides will probably not kill much of the tall fescue, but it should stunt the plants that are present long enough to give the new fescue seedlings a fighting chance. Be sure to follow all instructions found on the label.

Method 2 - The “Drill and Hope” Method - This method is similar to the one above, except for a couple of points. First, instead of using a herbicide to decrease the competition from the existing plants, use grazing. Have the field grazed extremely close, hoping to give the new seedlings a chance to get established. The second difference is the timing. Instead of doing it as soon as the fall rains begin, keep the pasture grazed and delay seeding until the last week or so of September. The goal is to use grazing and timing to minimize how fast the established plants can regrow, and how much competition they can cause. Everything else is the same. Use 15 lb of seed per acre, and use a no-till drill.

Both of these methods have a degree of risk involved. Weather conditions will greatly influence their success. As you can hopefully tell from the names, method 2 is much more risky than method 1.

To improve your chances of success, make sure the fertility is in good shape.
Also, use the full seeding rate for tall fescue, and don’t plant too deep. The seeds need to be placed ¼ to ½ inches deep. Try to avoid using any broadleaf herbicides until the spring. (Source: Dr. Gary Bates, UT Beef & Forage Center)

Agricultural Market Summary

Cattle Market Trends
This week’s calf market held firm with strong gains in the steer market and firmer prices for heifer calves. Feeder steers $2 to $5 higher, $180.00-$330.00; Feeder heifers steady to $1 higher, $140.00-$295.00; Slaughter cows steady to $2 lower, $87.00-$111.00; Slaughter bulls unevenly steady, $121.50-$152.00.

Grain Market Summary
Corn, soybeans, and wheat were down for the week. Corn – Cash prices, $3.37-$3.91. September futures closed at $3.64 a bushel, down 8 cents. Soybeans – Cash prices, $9.10-$10.60. September futures closed at $9.25 a bushel, down 50 cents a bushel. Wheat – Cash prices, $4.47-$4.95. September closed at $5.06 a bushel, down 4 cents a bushel since last Friday.

For additional information on these and other topics, contact the UT Extension Office, 925 East Baddour Parkway, Lebanon, TN 37087, 615-444-9584 or acorrell@utk.edu. UT Extension provides equal opportunities in all programs. Visit the UT/TSU Extension webpage at http://utextension.tennessee.edu/wilson or look for UT & TSU Extension, Wilson County on Facebook.

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