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RUCKER'S RAMBLINGS  
ANIMAL AGRICULTURE INFORMATION  
LIVESTOCK, HORSES & FORAGE  
MARCH 2021

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## **MANAGEMENT TIPS AND PRACTICES TO HELP STRETCH YOUR HAY (GRASS IS ON THE WAY)**

- \* Figure hay needs to avoid spending more than is necessary
- \* Know weight of bales, if possible, to help figure fair price and larger bales will last longer
- \* Supplement with silage, gluten feed, soyhulls or other products to reduce hay consumption
- \* Feed only what they will eat and in a feeding structure (ring, trailer, etc.) to reduce waste
- \* Reduce the number of head you are feeding: less to feed now and reduced grazing pressure will allow grass to regrow quicker in the spring

**DON'T DRIFT OFF TO SPRING YET:** We have experienced some warmer temperatures than we had in the recent past. I have started seeing some buds and a little green here and there. **DON'T BE FOOLED.** We are probably not done with winter yet. Keep tabs on your feed supply and make sure you have enough to get you through until we have adequate grass growth. Wouldn't surprise me for another cold snap or even some snow or ice to make one last guest appearance before we really get into spring.

## **GENERAL MANAGEMENT TIPS**

- \* Keep your horse's coat clean from mud. Mud reduces the natural insulation properties.
- \* Make cost effective decisions on fertilizing grassland.
- \* Plan your war against flies now. Use the most cost effective method for your operation.
- \* Think about weeds that were a problem and make plans to control them in 2021.
- \* Reduce stocking rates to reduce stress on grass and improve forage vigor.
- \* Vaccinate equine (horses, donkeys, mules) against West Nile Virus, Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis and more.
- \* Feed cattle a COMPLETE mineral mix with Hi-Magnesium to help prevent grass tetany.
- \* Keep a close eye on ALL livestock grazing lush forage growth for potential problems.
- \* Use good judgment & read labels when returning livestock to pastures that have been recently fertilized or treated for weeds.
- \* Work on hay equipment now instead of when you need it.

**NEEDING, BUYING & SELLING HAY:** The wacky weather of 2020 and the start of 2021 has many folks wondering if they have enough hay. I hear some producers say they will need a little to get them through. I know of a few producers with some for sale. If you know you need to purchase some hay, contact me and I'll try to help you fill that void. And even though spring is just around the corner, it would be wise for most producers to keep feeding hay to reduce the chance of livestock overgrazing the new grass and causing damage.



**\*\*UPCOMING WORKSHOPS:** As I have stated before, the COVID Pandemic has caused us to make some changes in the way we do programs. Zooms and Webinars have become commonplace. Agents have joined resources to implement joint, multi-county programs. Here are a few of those teamwork efforts. Make plans to attend these educational opportunities.

*Special accommodations will be made for the physically disabled, vision or hearing impaired person upon request. If special accommodations are required, please call Phil Rucker at 753-6100 or 849-7908, at least one week before the scheduled event*

**\*SMALL RUMINANT BEGINNER REPRODUCTIVE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP:** Join us on Thursday, March 11 at 6:30 p.m. to learn more about sheep and goat reproduction from Dr. Andrew Weaver, Sheep and Goat Specialist at NC State University and Dr. Daniel Poole, Animal Science Reproduction Specialist at NC State University. A flyer with program details is attached.

Topics include:

- Basic Reproduction (cycles, and ewe management)
- Pre-breeding management
  - Breeding Soundness Exams
  - Nutrition
  - Health Check
- Synchronization and Breeding Seasons
- Reproductive technologies
  - Artificial Insemination & Embryo Transfer
- Pregnancy Checking

For more information and to register visit this link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/135527138319>

**\*BACKYARD FLOCK WEBINAR – GENERAL BACKYARD POULTRY MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS:** The area specialized poultry agents are excited for the second session of the Backyard Flock Series to be held on March 17, 2021 via Zoom. The program begins at 12:00 Noon and will end about 1:00 PM. Please see the information below and attached flyer. Please register through the Eventbrite link [here](#) or

Eventbrite

link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/backyard-flock-series-general-backyard-poultry-medical-considerations-tickets-139977523541>

To register click the links in this email. The attached flyer is a jpeg and the links might not be accessible.

**\*2021 PIEDMONT REGIONAL BEEF CONFERENCE WEBINAR SERIES:** Join us online as the Piedmont Regional Beef Conference planning committee brings you an exciting series throughout the month of March! We have taken four sessions and spanned them across March to bring you one a week, for FREE, via Zoom. Sessions start at 7:00 pm. Topics include reproductive strategies, finishing beef cattle on forages, evaluation of carcass quality in live cattle, and warm-season forage options and research update. We have a great lineup of speakers ready to take your learning to the next level. While the sessions are free, registration is required to receive the Zoom link information.

March 4: Reproductive Strategies

March 11: Finishing Beef Cattle on Forages

March 18: Evaluation of Carcass Quality in Live Cattle

March 25: Warm-Season Forage Options & Research Update

Register online here: <https://go.ncsu.edu/prbcwebinarseries21>

**HORSE MANAGEMENT TIPS:** Spring is close and summer will be here before we know it. Warm weather calls for management practices to help keep horses healthy and ready for those pleasurable riding experiences. Grass will soon be actively growing and full of nutrition. Talk with your veterinarian about the possibility of nutrition issues to reduce the risks of digestion, hoof or obesity problems. The age, size and activity of your horse goes a long way in determining the nutritional needs.

Be careful grazing your horses this spring. The insulin resistant horse or a horse prone to laminitis or gastric issues is at a higher health risk during periods of lush grass growth. During photosynthesis, grass makes fructan (simple carbohydrate) all day while the sun is shining. High levels of fructans can cause hoof and other issues. At night, those fructans are used by the grass to grow or are stored in the root system. Thus, you can decrease the risks by grazing during the night and early morning while fructan levels are lower. During periods of lush growth, some options are to stable the horse during the day or maybe use poly-wire temporary cross fencing to allow only a little fresh grass each day to help limit free access to pasture during lush growth. Using a grazing muzzle during daytime turnout would help reduce the risks also. Seek advice from your veterinarian, on this issue and the potential risk for your horse. Make sure your horse receives their daily nutritional requirements if you implement limited grazing. Low risk horses are better able to digest these sugars and are less prone to their effects

Have your horse updated on all necessary vaccinations if not already done. Mosquito season is not far off and these pesky insects carry numerous diseases that can be transmitted to horses. Spring is also a good time to deworm your horse. Contact the Extension Center or your veterinarian for more information on these management practices, forages, pasture management and other equine production issues.

**PASTURE AND HAYLAND PROJECTS:** The extreme amount of rain we have experienced has not been kind to our pastures. Most of our forage land needs some management, if not some renovation to be able to meet our grazing needs. I'm seeing some evidence of the rain leaching minerals out of the grasses our livestock eat. All the mud and changing temperatures have only added to the stress.

Fertilizer is a necessity this year to help with forage growth. After all the rain we had, your grass will need that extra boost. Your forages will need some extra nutrients to perform well this spring. For some, cutting costs can be good, but being more efficient is better. Proper grazing and harvesting management, along with a good weed control program strengthens the forage stand, increasing the effectiveness of fertilizer applications. You must look at ways to be more cost effective with the applications. This is a year that fertilization will be important! Trying to STARVE A PROFIT into forage production will eventually lead to a weakened stand and unwanted expense to try to save it or start over.

Control weeds to help grass thrive. Now through late March is a good time to spray most cool season weeds. After three days of high temperatures in the 60's, the old standard of up to 2 pints of 2,4-D per acre for buttercup and a few other weeds provides benefits. This rate of 2,4-D will not kill established clover but can damage seedling clover. Mixing additional herbicides, such as dicamba, will help control a wider variety of weeds but increases the risk of clover injury. There are numerous broadleaf herbicides on the market that will control a wide variety of weeds. Many will also damage you're your clover. Decide what you need an herbicide to do and make your selection is based on your needs. When utilizing any herbicide; READ and FOLLOW LABEL DIRECTIONS. Be sure to treat these annual weeds before blooms appear or you will be disappointed with the results. REMEMBER that good forage management to improve your grass stand is one of the best ways to help control weeds.

Develop a grazing plan for your operation to help you utilize the forage efficiently. Overgrazing as well as undergrazing will reduce forage vigor and stimulate weed growth.

Sound management will help you keep a strong stand of grass that will work for you for years. With a few management practices, pastures and hay land can be very productive, providing abundant quality forage to our livestock. Isn't that what we want? Contact me if I can help or answer any questions.

**FOXTAIL CONTROL:** Foxtail has been making its presence known over the last few years and with the increasing amount of seed being dropped every year, Foxtail might be a little tougher weed to control this year. The best way to control foxtail is with a preemergent herbicide before the seeds germinate. Prowl H2O is a product now labeled for use in fescue pastures and hayfields. Prowl H2O can control a lot of weeds but for fescue pastures it does a good job on Foxtail. It will control annual weedy grasses and many broadleaf weeds. Read the label and make sure you don't kill something you want to keep. Foxtail germinates when the soil temperature warms up in the spring (usually mid April) so applying this product preferably before April 1, will help in your efforts to control. Prowl H2O needs to be rain activated within 2 days after application for best results. Results will be much less than expected without rain activation. Be sure to read and follow the label directions for all pesticides. Read the supplemental label for Prowl H2O <http://www.cdms.net/lдат/lд6CT019.pdf>

A local hay producer and I have looked into using Prowl and he has gathered some good information from a field rep from BASF. John said the Company Rep. advised him that the first application needs to be applied when the forsythia blooms. He says the bloom is an indication the ground temps are sufficient for foxtail germination. He also says to make 2 applications for full season control with the second application being made in late May/early June right after the first hay cutting. He suggested splitting the 4 quart per acre maximum annual load in half and apply 2 quarts to the acre in each application. He tells me the 2 quart rate will allow residual action that should last through the entire growing season. I advise you to Read the Label and contact BASF for more information or if you have additional questions.

More than likely, thick areas of foxtail have choked out other desirable grasses. So killing the foxtail could leave bare spots. When using Prowl H2O or other pendimethalin products, it takes about 10 months or so before grasses can be planted and germinate. Other weeds could try to take over those bare spots. Be prepared.

**PESTICIDE SAFETY:** Weeds are getting ready to pop and bugs are looking for somewhere to land. This usually means that folks are beginning to make their pesticide choices. Now is a good time to learn about these products and how to use them efficiently and more importantly - Protect yourself and the environment from the potential dangers pesticides can present when misused, mishandled or incorrectly stored. Remember that pesticide is a broad general description for many products (herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and even cleaners and disinfectants).

For maximum protection: Read the Label, Read it Again and Follow the Directions!!! The label is the law and is there for a reason. It tells you all you need to know about the product: what's in it, how much and how to use it, proper storage, potential dangers and much more. When you follow the label, you are using the product in the safest and most effective manner and not wasting the product.

Use the recommended rates. Using more than the label states is usually a bad idea. You will rarely get better results. Most of the time you will not improve the results. Sometimes too much product can actually decrease the effectiveness which wastes money and increases the potential of environmental consequences. Product overuse could leave residuals that could have a negative effect on your health, your family, your pets and more.

Some good pesticide awareness practices are:

- \* Store pesticides in their original container with proper label. Soda bottles or food containers are Bad Ideas!
- \* Store pesticides out of reach of children & pets and preferably behind a locked door.
- \* Use the recommended amounts listed on the label.
- \* Wash your hands with soap and water after any contact with a pesticide and its container.
- \* Keep children and pets from entering sprayed areas until the withdrawal time from the label has passed.
- \* Keep pesticides away from food and dishes.
- \* Wash clothes that come in contact with pesticide immediately and separately from other items.

The label is actually a federal law set forth by the EPA. So in a nutshell, the best way to educate yourself on the proper use of any pesticide is the READ and FOLLOW the LABEL DIRECTIONS!!

**DON'T SHORTCHANGE YOUR GENETICS:** I get numerous calls from cattle producers looking for a bull as “cheap” as they can get. For me, this is the wrong way to look at a herdsire. The bull's genetics makes up ½ (50%) of the calf crop. WHY do you want to skimp on such a major contributor to your operation? I know of producers who purchased lower genetic quality bulls because they were “cheap” and then complain because the buyers paid less for their calves saying they lacked quality. A bull is worth the price of 4-5 feeder calves (do the math). I hear that prices are low and “I can't afford to spend much on a bull”. It will be at least 18 months from conception until you market those calves. Low prices now have a good chance of being higher when you market those calves. A high quality bull will help your calves be more in line with the buyer's needs so you can get those better prices. I also advise you to maintain that bull in the best condition possible. When a bull loses condition, his fertility can suffer. He has a harder time covering the cows in the herd. You will spend more money to get a bull back in breeding shape than maintaining him. If he becomes infertile, how much time and money have you thrown away? Don't cut corners to save a little \$ up front because it might cost you more \$\$\$ on your bottom line.

Bull sellers need to sharpen their knives and castrate low quality bull calves. Just because he is a bull, does not make him a future herdsire. The way to improve prices, reputation and the overall beef industry is to produce quality cattle. Selling a low quality bull, just because he is a bull, doesn't really help anyone. Selling quality bulls helps you, the buyer and the industry.

**GRASS TETANY:** When the grass starts to turn green and grow, grass tetany is a threat, especially to cows nursing calves. Magnesium in commercial mineral supplements or home mixtures should be provided. Your goal is to get one ounce of magnesium oxide in the cow each day. Also a mixture of 3 lbs. magnesium oxide with 97 lbs. of grain or protein supplement fed at 2 lbs. per head per day will work. Magnesim

Start feeding high magnesium now, if not already. It takes a while to build the levels high enough to resist grass tetany. It's not an overnight thing and good preparation can save you some headaches later on this spring.

**FLIES AFFECT EVERYONE:** Flies are attracted to ALL livestock and poultry because manure and leftover feed are food sources for them. Flies can reduce animal performance as well as irritate human and animal alike. The recent weather has been pretty wet, setting-up a potential banner year for flies. Make your battle plans now. Don't wait until the animals are covered, your outside activities are invaded or even worse, your neighbors complain and relationships might be strained. Please contact me for fly control options before they become a major problem.

#### **HERD HEALTH TO-DO LIST FOR LIVESTOCK**

- \* Vaccinate equine (horses, donkeys, mules) against West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis and other issues your veterinarian recommends. Take precautions to minimize standing water where mosquitoes breed.
- \* Feed cattle a COMPLETE mineral mix with Hi-Magnesium to help prevent grass tetany.
- \* Check pastures for toxic plants or trees and treat accordingly. Repair fences, barns and working facilities to reduce the chance of injury.
- \* Keep a close eye on ALL livestock grazing lush forage growth for potential problems.
- \* Use good judgment and read the labels when returning livestock to pastures that have been recently fertilized or treated for weeds.