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Cool Season Grass Season

Another week – another missed chance for needed precipitation. The effect on cool season grasses may not be seen right away, but it's still a good time to begin planning ahead.

An understanding of some quick grazing arithmetic can help you make immediate plans. For example, well fertilized cool season forages are typically thought to produce between 250-300 pounds of dry matter forage per inch of height. Using a grazing stick or ruler, we can fairly quickly determine an average forage height, minus what we want to leave, and then determine how many pounds of forage we might have out there at any one time. Regularly measuring forage height and calculating production can give us a heads up as to when we might need to start adjusting stocking rates to compensate for declining forage supplies.

Harvest height is an important factor in determining how a forage will recover after grazing or haying. Generally, we want to leave a minimum of four inches of 'stubble' height whenever we harvest cool season grasses. Often, this leaves enough green material to allow the plant to recover quickly from feeding or harvest defoliation. Getting below this threshold can start to delay the recovery process, reducing stocking rate and potential production on the future.

Allow for ample recovery time. After heavy grazing, cool season grasses may need a rest period. Plan ahead to allow for rotation to warm season forages or stockpiled cool season sites to relieve grazing pressure. If the hay harvest window can be kept from being too late (July/August in most years), we provide an opportunity for that forage to benefit from mid-summer rains that may be fewer and farther between as we get in to late summer.

Watch for other issues. Armyworm feeding pressure is increasingly an issue. Start scouting in mid to late July to make sure they aren't doing irreparable harm to your stand. Other issues may arise as well, including drought or disease. In any of the above issues arise, stocking rate adjustments may need to be made.

The best emergency plans are those we don't have to implement. With any luck, good moisture will return and we can graze normally. If not, a little forward planning may have helped avert a bigger problem.

Fruit Tree Pests

Fruit production in Kansas seldom results in disease/insect free fruit. Lots of control products are available, but it's also good to consider cultural practices to help you out.

Start by maintaining a well-drained site with ample sun. This may require removal of larger surrounding trees or drainage work, but reducing moisture levels can be a huge benefit.

Make sure to water during drought. Consider mulching to regulate soil moisture and temperature and make sure soil test levels are in good shape. Bottom line: give the tree every opportunity to ward off potential issues that do arise by being healthy and actively growing. This includes pruning to make sure the canopy is kept open with good air circulation. At season's end, make sure you are cleaning up old tree limbs, leaves, and fruit debris that may harbor disease residue and allow it to overwinter. This can help reduce disease splashing up on to the trees next season.