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Livestock and Natural Resources

Snowy Icy, Icky

Snowy Icy, Icky is how the eastern half of Kansas is predicted to be for the winter of 2019. The western half of the state will be more wet than white, so says the Old Farmer's Almanac. Not good news for livestock producers, who are still trying to clean out lots and haul out manure and mud from last year.

Mud is not our friend whether you are drylotting your livestock or grazing stockpiled forages, cover crops or corn stalks. The wetter it is the more possibility of compaction, roots from cover crops and the freezing thawing process can help, but it does have to freeze to get all the benefits. A contingency plan is in order, whether it's summer time and you're facing a drought, or winter time and mud is a problem. A "winterized" dry lot is needed, especially in wet winters. Because mud costs money. Livestock burn more energy in mud just by moving around. This increased energy means more feed is required, and feed costs go up. Feed efficiency is decreased and losses of hay and feed go up.

When we first started working with the Geo textile fabric, we were advocating for building these feeding sites, away from streams or creeks, for better nutrient placement. Hay rings work so much nicer on these feeding sites. Under wet conditions the hay rings have mud soup around them in a regular lot. Last winter if you didn't have front wheel assist on your tractor, sometimes replacing bales became a challenge.

If you are lucky enough to have fence-line feeders, the geo textile fabric can make your feed lanes easier to use as well. It can even be put inside the fence so the cattle don't have to stand in a foot of mud to eat.

A feeding pad for 3 hay rings would be 24 X 142 feet, the fabric is \$1.40 a running foot, 12.5 feet wide.

The fabric would cost \$398, I'm not sure what you can get the 4-5 inches of rock for, but I know it's cheaper than concrete. Last year dry ground was at a premium! If you are interested in getting some fabric for a project, give me a call.

David G. Hallauer
District Extension Agent
Crops & Soils/Horticulture

The Effect of a Late Season Cutting of Cool Season Grasses

Drastically different conditions defined the summers of 2018 and 2019. What remains constant from fall to fall, however, is the way cool season grasses prepare for winter dormancy.

As temperatures drop in to the 70's, cool season grasses start growing again. As they do, photosynthesis via green plant leaves produces energy. Energy is first used to grow new leaves. When ample green leaf area has been produced, energy is transported to roots. Surplus root energy is stored to maintain the plant through the winter and initiate green-up when temperatures are right next spring. It's a simple, but often overlooked process that can result in drastic differences in future grass production if not managed correctly.

While 2018 heat and drought hurt many grass yields, our hot/dry period this summer came after most of our forage yield had been made. After that hot/dry period, ample moisture resulted in nice regrowth. It has even delayed haying in some cases.

What's all that mean for 2020 production? The summer of 2019 has allowed many cool season grass stands to 'gain a little ground' so we're not heading in to fall with such short forage supplies. With any luck, the better recovery period will result in higher tiller numbers next year. It still must be coupled with good management.

For fall grazing, maintain appropriate grazing heights of at least four to six inches. Harvesting below a four-inch height means the plant not only has to respond to the harvest of photosynthetic area, but may have to deplete root reserves to do so. If adequate time/rest aren't given to replenish reserves prior to winter dormancy, stands can be compromised.

To monitor forage growth, walk through the stand using a ruler or other measuring device to determine the average cool season grass height (don't measure foxtail and crabgrass heights). If below four inches, try to find an alternative. If regrowth has been good, grazing is okay with extreme caution to avoid removal of forage growth needed to help next year's stand.

If clipping for weed control, or if you are still trying to get hay up, keep mowing heights at four plus inches, staying above new growth when clipping if possible. This will keep too much forage from being removed and help facilitate a rapid recovery prior to dormancy.

Management now can help not only for 2020, but encourage good grass health in the future as well.

Tree Planting in the Fall

Spring is the preferred planting time for trees like beech, birch, redbud, magnolia, tulip poplar, willow/scarlet/black oak, willows, and dogwood. Fall is better for many others. Why?

Spring soils are cold and can be wet with low oxygen levels inhibiting root growth. Fall soils are warmer, often with good moisture for good root growth. Good fall root growth means trees become established months *before* spring-planted trees and can better withstand summer stresses.

The best time to plant? Early September to late October is early enough that roots can become established before ground freeze. The tops are dormant, but roots are actively growing, so make sure soils are moist (not soggy). If we experience warm spells in the winter, water again. Mulch is a good option to help minimize moisture loss while slowing soil cooling, allowing root growth to continue as long as possible.

Cindy Williams
Meadowlark Extension District
Food, Nutrition, Health, and Safety

Preserving Fall Tomatoes

Fall is almost here and gardeners may still have tomatoes to harvest. But once a frost or freeze occurs, those tomatoes should not be used for canning.

When tomato vines die, the acid level changes resulting in less acidic tomatoes. Even if recommended canning methods are used, these tomatoes will still be unsafe. The tomatoes can still be eaten fresh or frozen for later use.

Green tomatoes can be canned as a relish, salsa, or as regular tomatoes.

Do Tomatoes Need to be Peeled Before Canning?

Yes, and it takes extra time. But it is important and time well spent for safely canned tomatoes.

According to the National Center for Home Food Preservation, “Most bacteria, yeasts, and molds are difficult to remove from food surfaces. Washing fresh food reduces their numbers only slightly. Peeling root crops, underground stem crops, and tomatoes reduces their numbers greatly. Blanching also helps, but the vital controls are the method of canning and making sure the recommended research-based process times found in the USDA’s Complete Guide to Home Canning are used.”

Easily peel tomatoes by dipping them in boiling water for 30-60 seconds or just until the skins split. Then dip in ice water, slip off the skins and remove cores.

For more information concerning canning tomatoes and other methods of preserving foods, contact the Meadowlark Extension District Offices in Seneca, Holton and Oskaloosa. The Meadowlark Extension Office if you are interested in receiving any or all of these free newsletters on the following topics: Districtwide general newsletter; Crop Connections: Preserve It Fresh, Preserve It Safe (food preservation); Money Matters (money management) and Extension Response. The newsletter information is different from what you read in the newspaper columns.

These newsletters are free and can be sent electronically or by mail. To sign up, visit www.meadowlark.kstate.edu and look for the newsletter sign up icon. Your contact information will not be shared with other groups or organizations.

Nancy C. Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

Deciding to Breastfeed

Deciding how to feed your baby is one of the most important decisions expectant parents make during pregnancy. The first year of your baby's life is a time of rapid growth. Most babies triple their birth weight during the first year.

During the first year of life, the brain is growing rapidly as well. The circumference of the head increases by 4 to 5 inches in the first year, and the brain and nervous system continue to develop until about age 3. That's why it's important to make sure your baby gets the nourishment needed for developing to fullest potential.

Breast milk has all the nutrients your baby needs in the right amounts. It also has antibodies from the mother's body, which help keep her baby from getting certain types of illnesses. For example, breastfed babies get fewer ear and respiratory infections. A baby who is sick less often is better able to learn. Breast milk provides everything most babies need to build a healthy brain and grow properly for the first six months of life.

For the first six months of life, breast milk provides all of the nutrients a baby needs. When babies are 6 months old, solid foods should be introduced to ensure that the baby is getting adequate nutrition. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, it is ideal to breastfeed until the baby is at least 12 months old.

Is breast-feeding worth it if I can only do it for a short time? Absolutely! The first milk a new mother's body produces is the colostrum. Colostrum is especially high in antibodies, which help keep your baby from getting sick. Breastfeeding when your baby is born can help the baby get a healthy start.