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Pond Project

So my obsession with Blue/green algae has led me to understand the frustrations that the expert Doctors and scientists must be having with Covid-19. Just when you think you know the beast you are battling, it throws you a curve ball.

Just when you think this is a hot weather, static water, no air circulation problem, then you see Blue Green Algae under ice, in a stream-fed from a spring, and then you learn cattle died from Blue/Green algae in March in eastern Kansas.

I have partnered with KDHE and the Kansas State University Vet Diagnostic Lab to work on some pond projects. We have been buying some Barley straw from a producer in western Kansas. This spring, we will be installing the bales of Barley straw, and then KDHE will be testing the water before, during, and after the bales start deteriorating.

You might have seen a promotional article in the Topeka Capital Journal; the first projects have been installed at Gage Park and Melvern Lake Swim pond.

As the bales start to rot, they release hydrogen peroxide, which isn't attractive to the Blue/green algae. At least that's the hypothesis. So we will see, and if you'd like to try this with your own wheat straw bales, I would be happy to tell you how to go about installing. I am not looking for any more ponds for this project.

For now, I'm waiting for my waders to arrive so we can get started. Best of luck to the scientists trying to figure out Covid-19, you are rock stars!!

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

Grass Growth Issues

One of the most common observations by forage growers this spring has been the slow growth of pastures and hay fields. In some cases, its easily attributable to weather. In others, the reasons may be a result of a multitude of factors.

When assessing a forage stand issue, it's always good to look back, sometimes even multiple years, to see if an 'origin' of the problem can be found. Sometimes it can. Sometimes it can't. Often, however, it at the very least gives us some options to consider.

Think back over the last year or so of your forage stand. Spring 2019 was excessively wet for many. Forage production was better than it had been for a number of years for many years. Fields were thick and grew well. In some cases, the moisture delayed harvest to a degree, but yields were pretty good across the board.

July hit, and so did summer. Temperatures increased and moisture ceased, in some cases seemingly erasing the early season abundance we had. Forages in a recovery time period (post haying or after grazing) may have experienced quite a bit of heat/drought stress at a critical period of regrowth. In some cases, summer annual weeds took hold. Foxtail, in particular, reared its ugly head, causing yet another 'pressure' on our stand recovery, keeping our cool season species even further behind.

Depending on your hay timing or grazing management, the rapid end to the growing season may have had an effect as well. Grasses need a recovery period in the fall to grow enough leaves to capture sunlight energy to replenish root systems before winter dormancy. Our rapid drop from growing season to dormancy didn't give much time for some systems to provide recovery. Stands that don't have adequate growth in the fall tend to take off slower in the spring.

Spring 2020 brought varied moisture – but consistent cold events. An April stretch of frost/freeze events likely stunted growth of forages already struggling to take hold, with cloudy conditions following those events slowing recovery further.

Bottom line: a number of 'events' along the way likely have resulted in variable responses to fertilizer, grazing, and even herbicide applications this spring. The result will be a need for careful forage observations in the short term to make sure stocking rates are acceptable and herbicides are applied appropriately. Down the road, a hard look at forage supplies will also likely be necessary.

Too Wet to Mow?

Another wet weekend may have cut out your opportunity to mow. If so, it may start 'getting ahead' of your mowing more than you'd like.

Rather than maintaining your normal mowing height, now might be a time to raise mowing height and start lowering it in steps. It is always best never to take more than one third of the grass blade off at one time. When we do, the plant reacts by using stored energy reserves to quickly send up new growth, reducing energy available for to deal with weather stress or damage done by insects or disease. Raise deck height to achieve this when possible.

If not possible, raise the deck to cut as high as possible, even if you are removing more than a third. You'll likely have to mow more frequently, but you can then start to bring the height back down progressively to target height rather than all at once.

May 23, 2020

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

No News from Cindy.

Nancy Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

Walk Kansas Completes 20th Year

Nearly the same day that Kansans started staying home due to the looming COVID-19 pandemic, organizers of a popular K-State Research and Extension program were telling them to get out and walk.

The two events merged well since many local health authorities had determined that outdoor exercise was an allowable activity during stay-at-home orders.

“The timing really was kind of miraculous,” said Sharolyn Jackson, state coordinator of Walk Kansas, which just completed its 20th year. “We started this year’s program on March 15, and on March 16, we were instructed to start working from home. We did know that Walk Kansas wouldn’t be cancelled,” she said. “It was just going to be a little bit different this year.”

More than 7,000 people participated in this year’s program, which wrapped up on May 8. There were 189 participants in the Meadowlark Extension District.

Walk Kansas is an eight-week, team-based program that encourages Kansans to accumulate miles through walking or other physical activity, and – using a map of Kansas – monitor their progress past points of interest across the state.

The program is based on physical activity guidelines for Americans, and adults are encouraged to do 150 to 300 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week.

Walking is a highlighted activity, but Jackson notes that any activity that increases the heart rate can qualify for Walk Kansas miles. Walking is something most everyone can do and in the last two months, people have been outside and getting a lot more walking in.

Aside from physical activity, Jackson said Walk Kansas encourages participants to work on improving their health through dietary and lifestyle changes. A weekly newsletter was published during this year’s program that highlighted traits that make healthy communities.

“We assume that we inherit our good health or our not-so-good health,” Jackson said. “Genes do determine a portion of our overall health quality, but it’s only 20-25%. So, the rest of the health quality that we have really is attributed to our lifestyle habits and to the environment in which we live. It’s important for people to know that they have a lot more control over that than they think.”