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Agronomics with livestock in mind!



In the Field – Fall Weed Management

Silage has been harvested in most areas and cornfields lay barren. With recent rains many fields are greening up with weed growth. Without crops in the field many producers do not consider weed control at this time of year. However, fall herbicide applications can provide control of hardy perennials and winter annual weeds.

In the fall, perennial plants are building up root reserves for spring regrowth. Translocating nutrients to the roots will also help move systemic burndown herbicides (like glyphosate) to the plants' roots. As a result, fall is the best time to kill weeds that spread from rhizomes (i.e. quackgrass and Johnsongrass).

Winter annuals like chickweed can also be controlled at this time of year. These (winter annuals) are usually not considered to be important, but they can create some problems. Controlling winter annuals can help alleviate insect and disease issues later on. For instance, black cutworms migrate to and lay eggs in weedy fields in early spring – attracted by the remnants of winter annual weeds, which can create problems for newly planted crops.

In fields where recent weed problems were due primarily to summer annuals, like velvetleaf and lambsquarter, fall herbicide applications will not be a worthwhile investment. Consider the weed spectrum across fields before deciding whether or not to make a fall application.

Regardless of the magnitude of weeds in fields this fall, it is important to consider available options to help reduce future weed concerns – weeds that can deplete the soil of valuable nutrients, while hindering future crop growth that will benefit any feeding program.

Nutrition Depends on Agronomic Decisions

New forages are in the silo and nutritionists are blessing (or cursing) the forages they have to work with this fall and throughout the coming winter months. Reduced milk prices, which seem to help drive the increasing demand for a cheaper ration are forcing many producers to realize the importance of "Superior Silage". Key agronomic decisions, like cropping plans and hybrid selections are more critical than many realize. High crude proteins in haylage and high NEL's in corn silage should not be the only quality benchmarks used by producers and nutritionists, but they often are.

Before selecting hybrids for the coming season (2007) a very important step is to make a blueprint-type plan of

what crop will best 'fit' each field agronomically, as well as your overall program from a nutritional standpoint.

A fundamental factor to consider when selecting varieties is digestible NDF. The effects of adding forages with digestible fiber to a diet are often times underestimated. Fiber digestibility has a major impact on the profitability of a ration (*September 2006 FORAGER*). The proven equation, 1 unit of dNDF=0.37 lbs of DMI and 0.55 lbs of milk (*Oba and Allen, Journal of Dairy Science 82:589, 1999*) helps to demonstrate the importance of fiber digestibility.

Fiber digestibility is not only important for making milk. Utilizing forages with high dNDF in transition cow diets can help maximize dry matter intake, improving the cow's appetite at and after calving. A simple thing like increasing forage intake has an impressive effect on reducing the occurrence of metabolic problems in fresh cows and starting cows off on the right foot for the upcoming lactation.

Poor agronomic decisions made on the farm have a snowballing effect on the farm's profitability, in a negative way. It is commonly believed that to obtain quality feed, yield must be given up. This is not true. Many silage corn hybrids are available today that provide superior digestibility, and actually offer yield advantages over conventional dual-purpose hybrids. BMR corn hybrids still have some yield drag in stress situations, but offer such high NDF digestibility that their feeding performance quickly pays for any yield loss. Proper placement and timely harvest will go a long way in reducing any yield drag. Other crops like BMR sorghum-sudangrass varieties can also offer improved digestibility and high forage yields. There are numerous options for improving fiber digestibility in most operations without losing yields. Check out all the information before making a final decision, ensuring that your goal is quality forage... quality nutrition... results!



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