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News and Information from UT-TSU Extension Wilson County

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Need Pasture Improvement – Add some Clover

I know everyone says I have heard this before but it is hard to say this enough. It is good to make sure you have clovers in your grass pastures. The majority of cattle in Tennessee graze tall fescue and/or orchardgrass pastures. While these pastures provide good quality forage, they can be improved. One of the best and easiest ways for improvement is to add legumes such as red or white clover and an annual lespedeza to these pastures.

Clovers are legumes which can take nitrogen from the atmosphere and incorporate it in nodules on the roots of the legume. The legume has enough nitrogen in these nodules for its purpose plus some to share with surrounding plants. One of the most common forage recommendations made across the Southeast is to plant clovers in grass pastures. The yield of a tall fescue and clover mixture will be equal to a pure tall fescue stand fertilized in spring with 60 lbs. of nitrogen per acre. With the price of fertilizer, this can save a significant amount of money.

Many producers experience inconsistent results in clover stand establishment. There are several reasons for the difference in producer experiences with clover success. Seeding rate and environmental conditions are two common reasons but one of the most common reasons for the failure of clover seed to emerge and establish is due to planting the seed too deep. Clover seed is very small, and needs to be planted less than ¼ inch deep. Using no-till drills to plant clover seed in February and March can make it difficult to control seeding depth. The drills are heavy and the ground is soft. For this reason, it is often better to broadcast the seed on top of the ground. Make sure grass present in field is short by grazing or cutting when seeding. Make sure the seed gets to the soil if broadcasting.

The steps to planting clover into a fescue pasture are:

1. Soil test first and then fertilize according to soil test except for nitrogen. Do not add nitrogen because but it stimulates grass growth, and increases the potential of the clover being shaded out by the grass. But it is very important to have a proper pH, sufficient phosphorus and sufficient potassium
2. Seed 2 lbs. ladino white clover and 4 lbs. red clover per acre. With the clovers, be sure to use pre-inoculated seed, or inoculate the seed yourself. Broadcasting can work the from February 15 to March 1 but you will need to drill the seed if planted after March 1. Make sure seed falls on bare ground or
3. To insure persistence of the clover, delaying grazing until the pasture is 8 inches tall. This will allow the clovers to develop a root system and not get pulled out of the ground by grazing.

Another good reason to plant clovers into pastures is to mitigate the negative effects of the tall fescue endophyte. The most common tall fescue is infected with a fungus called an endophyte. The endophyte has positive points and negative points. The fungus has a negative impact on animal gain and reproduction. Yet, the endophyte has a positive impact on plant persistence, drought tolerance and plant survival when overgrazed. Clovers in the pasture help dilute the negative effects on animal gain and reproduction.

Bottom line...utilizing clovers is a simple tool to improve the quality of pastures and hayfields while at the same time reducing costs.

Important Upcoming Events:

•Mid-South Stocker Conference, February 26, Warren County Extension Office, Bowling Green, KY
<https://www.facebook.com/Midsouthstockerconference>; <https://mssc2020.eventbrite.com> for registration.
Premier event for stocker operators and/or those interested in stocker cattle.

•**Tennessee Beef Agribition** – March 13-15, 2020 – James E. Ward Ag. Center, Lebanon, TN. Angus, Charolais, Hereford, Limousin, Shorthorn, Shows and Sales. Jr. Show on Sunday. See: <http://www.tnbeefagribition.com/home.html> for more information.

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