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CROP AND LIVESTOCK

Update

Considerations for S T R E T C H I N G Forage Supplies

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The year has not been kind to Indiana forage producers. It all began in 1995 with a dry late summer and autumn that resulted in few successful new seedings. It continued with a harsh winter that caused much damage to perennial forages, especially alfalfa. And the woes didn't quit there as producers wondered if pastures would ever grow to full potential in the spring, or if first cutting hay would be completed before the 4th of July because of persistent rain. And if that wasn't bad enough, throw in two weeks of dry weather and a high population of the sap-sucking potato leafhopper.

The following ideas might be useful as farmers consider late season means to reduce problems caused by the weather.

1. Inventory the amount of forage on hand and have each lot of hay and silage tested for forage quality. Knowing forage quality will help producers plan ahead for supplemental feed purchases needed for their particular type of livestock.

2. Determine whether pasture is short or abundant. If growth is abundant, consider harvesting a portion of the pasture as conserved forage or stockpiling for late-autumn use. Stockpiling refers to the addition of 50 lbs. of N per acre by mid-August after the pasture's paddocks have been grazed, and deferring grazing these paddocks again until mid- to late autumn. If pasture growth is short, project how much hay or silage will need to be fed during the growing season to meet livestock needs.

3. Determine forage deficit or surplus by calculating how much feed the livestock will need to carry them until next spring. Be liberal in the amount assumed to be needed by the livestock as hay prices will likely be astronomical in price in late winter and early spring 1997.

4. Where acreage is available for planting, and an acute need for forage exists in the autumn, consider planting spring oats, winter small grains or brassica crops such as forage turnips. Spring oats and turnips should be planted by early August. Livestock owners who have used turnips suggest that the livestock would benefit by seeding oats along with the turnips as brassicas are extremely low in fiber. Consult Purdue University Extension publication AY-263 for specific details. Refer to the labels of pesticides used in the past year or two on the acreage to be seeded to avoid herbicide carryover concerns. In my opinion, it is too late in the season to get much benefit by seeding summer-annual grasses such as sudangrass or pearl millet after mid-July.

5. Have livestock graze corn residues in the autumn. This feedstuff is low quality, especially when minimal corn grain loss occurs, and best fits the needs of beef cows and ewes that will give birth in the late winter or spring. A small amount of high-quality hay may need to supplement the corn residues if body condition is moderate or less. Harvesting

bales or stacks of residues is not advised because of the cost of harvesting such a low quality feedstuff and the increased wear and tear on equipment.

6. Contact grain producers in the area who planted soybeans or corn at a late date. If a killing freeze occurs before the grains are physiologically mature, there may be opportunities to harvest the crops as silage. Grain producers without livestock will want to secure some income. And ruminant livestock owners in search of a feedstuff may find their only market here if grains do not mature. Livestock producers without silo structures who opt to have immature, freeze-damaged corn or soybeans custom harvested as silage must plan for temporary trench or bunker silos, or find a silage bagger.

7. Contact a trained nutritionist and discuss ration alternatives. Shifting toward use of more corn silage and less hay crop silage or dry hay should be considered if hay crops were in low supply and more corn can be harvested as silage. Much acreage of sorghum-sudangrass was planted and farmers need to be aware that quality of this crop is inferior to corn silage when no increase in supplementation occurs. Capabilities of properly priced and utilized by-product feeds to stretch traditional feed resources should be discussed with a trained nutritionist.

8. Early wean beef calves so as to reduce pasture consumption and quality needs of their dams.

9. Contact cash crop hay producers in Indiana and beyond to see if hay can be transported at reasonable cost. Consider all alternatives carefully before buying hay at an excessively high price. Don't buy hay without having a forage test.

10. Cull less productive livestock or females that don't conceive.

11. Consider harvesting high-moisture ear corn as an alternative to high-moisture shelled corn. Further processing of high-moisture ear corn has been shown to increase starch digestibility by dairy cows.