

Chair's Corner

By Bob Drake, Oklahoma

Amidst rising prices for feed and fuel, the livestock industry is facing a new era. And, as a result, grazing management is being given more attention. A recent BEEF magazine survey showed that about 68% of cattle producers surveyed said they planned to alter their forage management as a means to help decrease feed costs. As the industry finds its way through these new challenges, the GLCI's work to bring technical grazing assistance to private landowners continues to be paramount. I commend all of our state coalitions for their grassroots efforts this summer in hosting ranch tours and workshops to continue bringing knowledge about grazing management to producers.

Our national steering committee will be convening in Harrisburg, PA, for our annual fall business meeting Sept. 5-6. This is always a great opportunity to see the GLCI efforts in the region through the day-long tour; followed by our business meeting. This year we will be rolling up our sleeves and working on plans for the Fourth National Conference on Grazing Lands (4NCGL). This event will be held Dec. 13-16, 2009 at John Ascuaga's Nugget Hotel & Casino in Reno-Sparks, Nevada. Our theme is Grazing Lands - A Winning Hand and the objective of the conference is "To Heighten Awareness of the Economic and Environmental Benefits of Grazing Lands."

Later this fall we will be launching the call for papers for this event. The success of the conference is in having real producers share their grazing stories - successes and lessons learned. So think about joining us in Reno in 2009, and better yet, think about sharing a presentation that others can learn from.

Stay tuned for more details on this great conference.

New National GLCI Logo Developed



A new logo has been developed to represent the GLCI on the national level. Thanks to Texas Public Affairs Specialist Lori Valadez and her team for their creativity on this project. If your state would like access to an electronic version of this new logo contact Kindra Gordon at office@gordonresources.com or call her at 605-722-7699.

To have your GLCI activities or upcoming events highlighted in this newsletter, contact Kindra Gordon at phone 605-722-7699 or kindras@gordonresources.com.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Look to Legumes
Getting more mileage
out of your forage.

GLCI Spotlight
See what's happening
from South Dakota to
Guam.

Upcoming Events
What's in the near future
for GLCI?

Chair's Corner
Fall Business Meeting
is Sept. 5-6



Look to Legumes

By Kindra Gordon

Increased forage quality, nitrogen fixation, and extending the grazing season are just a handful of reasons these forage specialists like legumes.

With the escalating cost of feed and fertilizer, savvy beef producers need to be finding ways to get more mileage out of their forages. Many believe legumes could be that answer.

In fact, Garry Lacefield and Don Ball say the one component that most successful livestock grazers have in common is that they include legumes - such as alfalfa, clovers or lespedeza - in their forage systems.

Lacefield is Extension forage specialist at the University of Kentucky, and Ball is Extension forage agronomist at Auburn University. The duo has traveled across the U.S. and to many foreign countries evaluating different forage systems, and they've become huge advocates for legumes.

Ball says, "We think there are some good reasons to use legumes, and some things have changed in society and agriculture that make it even more imperative for producers to start using legumes." That reason is nitrogen.

The Need For Nitrogen

Ball explains that until recently, nitrogen fertilizer was relatively inexpensive and it was convenient for producers to use commercial nitrogen sources to fertilize pastures. However, nitrogen isn't cheap anymore, and he says, "I don't think it will be again."

Lacefield concurs, saying, "The availability of inexpensive nitrogen in agriculture is history. So producers need to start looking to legumes, which have the ability to fix nitrogen and help boost pasture productivity."

Additionally, Lacefield and Ball point out that the availability of corn has greatly declined due to demands from ethanol. Thus, they say livestock producers should also be looking at legumes as a means to increase forage quality and ultimately boost animal gains without having to rely on as much grain supplementation.

Lacefield sums it up by saying, "From an agronomic, environmental, and even a patriotic standpoint, legumes have an important role in the future. The need to use them is greater than it's ever been."

(continued on page 2)

Look to Legumes (continued from page 1)

The Case For Legumes

Lacefield and Ball say there is much to admire about legumes. Topping the list are legumes' ability to boost forage yield and quality.

Regarding yield, alfalfa is an example that often out does grasses. For instance, on average, dry matter yield of orchardgrass is typically 2 to 5 tons/acre; smooth bromegrass 2 to 4 tons/acre; and alfalfa weighs in at 3 to 6 tons/acre. Similarly, other legumes have high yield potential as well, Ball says.

Lacefield also likes legumes for their high quality. They have higher crude protein content, relative feed value and total digestible nutrient values than grasses. Additionally, digestibility of legumes (which is intake and rate of passage) is usually about 36 hours, compared to 90 hours for grasses.

Of course, quality is ultimately measured by animal performance and numerous studies have shown it. He reports that in one study with white clover, a 60% improvement in calf weight gains was documented as well as increased conception rates of cows due to better quality of legumes with grasses. "So yes, there is clearly a case for adding legumes," Lacefield says.

Because of their ability to enhance forage quality and yield, Ball and Lacefield say legumes make a productive companion species to both annual and perennial grasses. For instance, red clover works well with either tall fescue or orchardgrass.

Including legumes in grass stands has also been shown to reduce the effects of grass tetany and fescue toxicity. And, most recently, research indicates tannins in some legumes such as sericea lespedeza reduce the number of internal parasites in grazing animals.

Some grass-legume combinations can also help get through the summer grazing slump and extend the grazing season. One example is annual lespedeza grown with tall fescue. Fescue makes most of its growth in spring and fall, while annual lespedeza provides forage in mid- to late summer and early autumn.

Ball suggests producers really need to look at how legumes can fit scenarios like this to provide high quality feed over the longest time period possible. He says, "Every day grazed is money saved."

Overcoming Obstacles

All that said, why haven't forage legumes been used more widely? Ball admits there have been some perceptions that have prevented legumes from finding favor with producers.

Probably the biggest concern is over bloat. But Ball says the fear of bloat is mostly perception and not reality. During his 30 year career he's seen very few livestock deaths due to bloat. He adds, "It's a manageable problem. It shouldn't keep producers from realizing the benefits legumes offer."

Simple management tactics like avoiding putting animals on legumes when it is wet, or if they are overly hungry can help decrease the risk of bloat.

Lack of stand persistence has also been an issue with legumes. But Ball and Lacefield report that with management that can be minimized. More grazing-persistent varieties of alfalfa and clovers are also becoming available.

Cost of establishing legumes may also prevent some producers from investing in them. But Ball says the profit potential that legumes add more than makes up for the start-up costs.

He estimates that total cost for establishing clovers with grass pastures can be anywhere from \$15 to 50/acre, and notes that alfalfa would cost more to establish. But he believes most of the time the nitrogen benefits alone from the legumes would more than pay for that expense. Not to mention factoring in the economic benefits of a 5-20% increase in conception rate, additional beef gains, and decreased fertilizer costs.

To add to the argument, Ball reports that research involving 37 different forage systems for stocker cattle in Alabama showed that 7 of the 10 lowest cost operations used forage legumes, indicating it's an investment well spent.

Ball and Lacefield suggest that in many situations including legumes at 25 to 50% of a pasture mix works well. They say that in return producers should be able to extend their grazing season as well as see higher forage yield, better forage quality, increased conception rates and weaning weights, and reduced toxicity issues.

Given all those benefits, Ball says, "There are a lot of farms where legumes could be used more than they are. We hope producers will open their minds and consider legumes."

More Reasons To Like Legumes

Auburn University Extension agronomist Don Ball says more reasons forage legumes are appealing is because of their benefits to society. Here are some examples:

- Pastures with legumes tend to be more colorful and attractive. While that provides some scenic value, it keeps pastures more interesting and diverse for grazing livestock too, says Ball.
- Because legumes provide an environmentally friendly source of nitrogen, they are being used in creative ways as a substitute for commercial fertilizer. One example is using legumes as ground cover in pecan orchards, Ball reports.
- Legumes are beneficial to wildlife and many species of birds because of their nutrient quality, excellent bottom cover for habitat, and flowers which attract insects. Likewise, legumes are a good source of pollen for bees.
- In cropping systems, legumes can be beneficial because of their residual nitrogen, their roots and leaves which can improve soil tilth, and as a crop to break pest cycles.

While alfalfa is likely the most well-known legume, there is a long list of others to consider including red clover, white clover, birdsfoot trefoil and lespedeza.

Lacefield and Ball have co-authored the book *Southern Forages* with University of Georgia professor Carl Hoveland where they list 32 different legumes. The book is available for \$30 plus shipping and handling from the Potash and Phosphate Institute by calling 770-825-8084.

GRAZING GOES TO GUAM

Technical grazing assistance was taken all the way to Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI) this spring when the Marianas Resource Conservation & Development Council, in cooperation with the three CNMI Soil and Water Conservation Districts hosted a series of free grazing workshops for interested farmers, ranchers and conservation agencies in the CNMI.

The workshops focused on various aspects of grazing lands management including recommended plants for the best quality livestock forage, pasture planting techniques, weed control options, animal nutrition, soils and other management principles designed to give island cattle and goat ranchers the tools they need to maximize productivity while protecting their animals' health and conserving their natural resources.

Technical expertise for the workshop was provided by grazing experts from NRCS. Presenters for the workshop included area soil scientist Robert Gavenda from Guam, and state rangeland conservationist from Hawaii, Lori Metz, along with Jeff Repp and Gene Fultz, both grazing land technology specialists from the NRCS West Region Technical Center in Portland, Oregon.

Portions of the workshop included a walking tour of a working ranch that is currently participating in NRCS conservation programs.

Stewardship for Horse Farms

Source: Elizabeth Marks, USDA NRCS

Equestrian Land Conservation Resource (ELCR) and Hudson Mohawk Resource Conservation & Development Council (HMRC&D) of New York are offering "Keeping It Green: Pasture and Environmental Farm Management for the Horse Owner" at ELCR's web site, <http://www.elcr.org>

The collaboration between ELCR and the HMRC&D is intended to raise awareness and improve knowledge amongst horse owners across the nation about how to improve pastures and minimize their horse's impact on the environment. With open space disappearing at the rate of 250 acres per hour, it is important for horse people to recognize the crisis of loss of land for horses and the importance of caring for the land we have.



Degraded pastures and improper manure management can have a serious, detrimental impact on the environment. This video is useful for the management of horse properties and pastures. The video is offered in 8 segments with titles such as "Water Quality and Manure Management," "Rotational Grazing - Weed & Forage Control," and "Drainage Improvements in High Traffic Areas." Funding for the segments was provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative.

For more information and to view the segments, please visit <http://www.elcr.org>

BUSY BEAVERS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition has a full slate of educational grazing events throughout the summer. In June they hosted their second annual "bird tour" at the Dar Peckham ranch near Bristol, SD. Also in June, two pasture walks with BBQ suppers were hosted at two ranches and featured University of Nebraska's Terry Gompert, a holistic resource management specialist.

In mid-August the SDGC has scheduled a bus tour of ranches with innovative grazing practices in North Dakota, and September 8-10 they'll host their annual "Grazing School" at Oacoma. The South Dakota coalition is also teaming up with a regional livestock newspaper to produce a special Range & Pasture publication three times per year that will be distributed to 10,000 cattlemen in the region.

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition has 160 dues paying members. Asked how they've been so successful, rancher Jim Faulstich, who serves as vice chairman on the board, credits it to monthly meetings. He says not all of their 7 board members can be at every meeting, but by meeting regularly, the group has been able to accomplish many projects. For more about South Dakota's efforts, visit their website at www.sdgrass.org.

MORE UPCOMING GRAZING EVENTS

The 2008 Nebraska Grazing Conference is scheduled for **Aug. 12-13** in Kearney, Neb. The University of Nebraska's Center for Grassland Studies coordinates the program which focuses on grazing topics such as rangeland monitoring, modifying animal behavior, using co-product feeds for grazing cattle, marketing grass-fed beef and adapting to high feed and fuel costs. The fee for pre-registration before Aug. 1 is \$75; after Aug. 1 the cost is \$90. For more details and registration information, contact 402-472-4101, grassland@unl.edu or visit <http://www.grassland.unl.edu/grazeconf.htm>

Oct. 7-8 – Nebraska and South Dakota sections of the Society of Range Management will hold a joint meeting along with the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition in Valentine, NE. The theme is "Alternatives for Sustainable Grasslands."

Oct. 23 – Kentucky Grazing Conference, Fayette County extension office, Lexington. Learn more at www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/.

Nov. 6-7 – 2008 BEEF Quality Summit, sponsored by BEEF magazine, Antlers Hilton Hotel, Colorado Springs, CO. Visit beefconference.com/.

Submit your upcoming grazing events for the Sept./Oct. issue to office@gordonresources.com.