

The Forager

THE NORTH CAROLINA FORAGE AND GRASSLAND COUNCIL
IN COOPERATION WITH

THE NRCS -GRAZING LANDS CONSERVATION INITIATIVE AND
NCSU-NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

THE

FORAGER

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Seeding and Managing Native Grasses

By Wistar Heald, Evergreen Seed Co.

Native grass seeding is more challenging than using general purpose varieties, but the rewards of establishing a native stand are worth the effort. Native grass species have grown through evolution to develop resistances to many of the problems that the newer grass varieties haven't successfully been bred to handle. Planting warm season species of native grasses provide excellent winter cover for wildlife. These tall, stiff, upright grasses endure snow and ice very well. They also put most of their growth in the heat of the summer unlike the cool season grasses of your lawn which grow most in the spring and fall. After establishment, native grasses will live a long time but will generally be slow to establish like most long-lived species. Therefore, it is very important to establish these grasses properly and have patience when evaluating the results.

Warm season native grasses grow best during the warmest months of the year, typically from June to September. Big and Little Bluestem, Indiangrass, and Switchgrass are the most common warm season grasses sown in the Southeast. These varieties are deep rooted, long lived perennials with considerable tolerance to relatively low pH, low fertility, and drought.

Before planting, it is essential to reduce competition from other vegetation that may be present such as other grasses and broadleaf weeds. Native grass seedlings are slower to establish, and can easily be overgrown by faster growing cool season grasses and weeds in the spring. For sites that need extensive preparation, most of the work can be done prior to late spring planting by mowing the fields and treating the area with a good herbicide. You can use a nonselective like glyphosate, or a selected like 2, 4-D to control broadleaves. If you do not want to use herbicides, you will need to cultivate the field or planting site. However, cultivation is much less effective and

can actually create a good seed bed for more weed growth. There are several different types of native grasses that, because of their physical characteristics, must use separate drills to plant the seed. Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, and Indiangrass have fluffy or chaffy seeds that are best planted by using a native grass drill. This drill has a picker wheel in the seed box that stirs the seed and pushes it down into the large drop tubes. Switchgrass and Wildryes are relatively clean seed that can be planted using a conventional no-till grass drill or seeder. Eastern gamagrass has a large, clean seed and can be planted with an acorn planter. Only as a last resort should you broadcast plant into a seed bed that has been prepared because it is very difficult to get good seed placement in the soil. Warm season natives have a recommended seeding date of April 15 to July 15 at a rate of 6-8lbs. PLS per acre. Apply lime and fertilizer according to needs determined by a soil test. These native grasses prefer a firm seedbed to ensure good soil to seed contact. Native grasses need very little nitrogen. Applying nitrogen at the time of planting will only encourage the growth of other grasses and weeds.

Most growers of native grasses are convinced that they have a failure the first year. Most of the time they actually have a good stand. These grasses grow down instead of up during the establishment year. The top growth amounts to a narrow, straight leaf until late summer. These seedlings can be hard to see at first so be patient. Native grasses usually take 2-3 years to be fully established. For the first growing season be sure to not allow grazing. Proper grazing use allows the land to be grazed at an intensity that maintains enough cover to protect the soil while maintaining and improving the quantity and quality of the desired vegetation. Growing season for these grasses is defined as April 1-October 15. A grazing rule of thumb is 'take half and leave half' during a growing season of the available forage.

From Amazing Grazing, October 2012: Extra Effort Eventually Pays Off By Dr. Matt Poore

As I sit to write this month it is raining outside and we have seen a very wet August with normal temperatures. That is a big change from the early summer, and certainly a far cry from what folks in the mid-west and west have had to endure.

It has been a wild ride this summer with an early outlook for a bumper corn crop and crazy calf prices, and then the biggest mid-west drought in recent history. It is easy for me to look back and feel sorry we didn't jerk the trigger and sell 3 and 4 weight calves for \$2 per lb, but based on the information we had at the time we made the right decision. As it turned out we sold our 6 weights for \$1.44, the highest price we have ever received, and even with high feed and fertilizer prices we will end up in the black this year.

The main reason for the positive outcome through all of this is that we have grass. For us at home it was record hot and dry all through June and July. The pastures dried up for sure, but we are stockpiling grass ahead of the cows and rationing it out in 2 or 3 day cuts, instead of cutting all the excess we can for hay. We have just made it all the way around with the first rotation in some pastures, and there is a lot of forage there including a lot of summer grasses. This type of system makes for a lot more forage cover, cooler soil, and when it rains even a little the grass grows some. I expect this approach is going to be more and more popular in the future. If you have your stocking rate right, and allow for long rest periods following a hard grazing, it appears that you can make beef with a pretty low input. Learning about how to efficiently use temporary fencing is the key to making the whole thing work, but it is fun to learn about and really gives you power over the system.

Through all the market swings and crazy weather I spent most of the summer traveling the state doing a variety of workshops and other educational events with a team including Bryan Blinson (NCCA), Neil Bowman (NCDA&CS), Sharon Freeman (NCSU Animal Science), and Mark Alley (NCSU CVM). We have engaged a great number of people in our workshops and it is clear that hands-on training with small numbers of participants is how our producers like to learn. A major focus of the workshops has been to stress the many practical projects that have been funded by the NC Cattle Industry Assessment Program. If you missed attending one of these events, fear not, we plan on continuing to provide you with these practical educational opportunities in the future.

As I present at these workshops it amazes me how little many of us know about how to manage our pasture systems. I have been learning rapidly about how to manage pasture for the last 5 years, and continue to pick up ideas whenever I am around other folks that have caught the grazing bug. There really is quite an art to using temporary fencing and managing pasture, and I look forward to continuing to develop my skills.

One of the major events that was scary and fun this past month was holding a field day/tour at our place Triple Creek Ranch in Virgilina, VA on August 23rd. They say you should have a big event like this every 5 years or so just so you keep things cleaned up. It has been seven years since we had a major event, so needless to say we had a monumental task getting stuff "picked up". My nephew and herdsman Korey Muller ended up putting a great deal of extra effort into it with the help of a lot of volunteers, and the place looked great but still like a real farm.

The team working with the event was composed of extension agents, state soil and water conservationists, NRCS staff from both North Carolina and Virginia, and the NC and VA Forage and Grassland Councils. The tour visited 5 stops in the front area of the farm, the first of which discussed improving grazing management and better using the resources you have (Chris Teutsch, VA Tech). The second discussed how to use summer annuals to speed the conversion from toxic to non-toxic fescue (Brian Campbell, VA Tech), and the third demonstrated small scale irrigation and pressurized watering systems using tire tanks (Joe Davidson, Berry Hill Irrigation and Taylor Clarke, VA Cooperative Extension). The fourth stop discussed riparian area and wildlife conservation (Raymond Cocke, NRCS and Mark Puckett, VA Dept of Game and Inland Fisheries), and the fifth low-stress cattle handling (Mark Alley, NCSU).



Bette Laursen in Ray's Crazy Summer Mix

Amazing Grazing (Continued) By Matt Poore

The featured after dinner speaker was Johnny Rogers who talked about the 6 characteristics of a successful grass farmer. Johnny and his spouse Sharon live near Roxboro and raise cattle, sheep, hogs and poultry for sale through farmers markets, wholesale markets, and as breeding stock. Johnny told the crowd that he had many options for his life and career, but that he had always wanted to farm and was making that happen through hard work and willingness to try something new and different when it looked like an opportunity.

I was very worried about the logistics of the whole thing, but in the end we fed 260 people, and had 235 participate in the tour. It wore out the speakers to repeat their talks five times, but everything stayed on time, was very organized, and the weather was beautiful. Thanks so much to all the committee that helped, but especially to Charlie Wooten of the Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District in Farmville, VA who was the point person for the educational tour and facilitated rotation through the stops, and Bobby Long of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation who focused on making the hamburger dinner a success. In the end I felt really good about the event and was glad that we had tried something interesting with our pastures to show to folks, and then had a good turnout to see our place.

But....that was not how I was visualizing it turning out back in late-June! We planted our 25 acres of summer annual cover crops June 9 and 10 into moderately dry soil. We planted a variety of things to show at the field day including a mix of cowpeas and sorghum/sudan, a mix of Tyrone Soybeans and sorghum/sudan, and 5 varieties of sorghum/sudan and browntop millet (with 40 lb/acre nitrogen added) in 18 foot strips. We also planted a cocktail mixture we developed with the help of Ray Archuleta from NRCS. That mix contained soybeans, cowpeas, sorghum/sudan, pearl millet, foxtail millet, turnip, daikon radish, kale, and sunflower. This is now known as Ray's Crazy Summer Mix.

We received 0.3 inches of rain the day following seeding, but then it turned hot and dry. Some of the summer annuals came up but it was spotty and by late June I was really worried about having a complete bust come August 23. In July it got even hotter and drier. When you walked the summer annuals you could see that the plants were there but they were very small with burnt tips, and the sorghum/sudan was always curled up tight. We did have 0.1 or 0.2 inch rains several times in late July, but every time I walked the pastures the plants were rolled up and small and looking terrible (but alive). Some of the sorghum x sudan was knee high, but it was so drought stressed we were afraid to graze it.

We ended up deciding July 15 to set up a k-line irrigation system to water a small area just so we would have something alive to show at the field day. That watering provided one application of about 1 inch to an area of about an acre over the 3 weeks Korey watered. The watering helped considerably and the area that was watered (planted in Ray's Crazy Mix) got to looking ok and about waist high. Still, too little to graze given everything else was no more than knee high.

In early August we had 2.5 inches of rain over 3 days, and then a week later we had another 1.4 inches. Within 10 days of the first rain when I returned from a trip to Arizona, I found that the sorghum/sudan had leapt from knee high to chest high. Korey had already been grazing it about a week when I got there but once the canopy really closed over with good soil moisture the stuff went crazy. By the time of the field day the irrigated area was about 8 to 10 feet tall, with a very interesting combination of forages. I have to tell you I felt foolish planting turnips, radishes, and kale at the start of summer, but was sort of talked into it. Also, that complex mixture is so different than anything I have grown I just don't know what to expect. How do you plant that kind of a crazy mix and get your calibration right? I still don't know for sure.

Still, the idea of having a daikon radish 8 inches deep opening up our soil, and having a diversity of other plants there doing different functions is intriguing. I am not sure how to judge this complex mixture compared to the other areas with just soybeans or cowpeas planted with sorghum/sudan. They also look phenomenal. While the sorghum/sudan has gotten away from us, the cowpeas and soybeans are crawling up over the canopy and producing a lot of high quality biomass. With strip grazing and daily moves the calves and springing heifers we are running are cleaning it up remarkably well, and while a lot of the big sorghum/sudan stems are being trampled, they are providing good ground cover and the cowpeas, turnips and radishes especially are growing back fast and will give us a good second grazing.

The moral of this article is that you need to evaluate your situation and do something about it despite the obvious risk involved in change. Don't be afraid to put in some extra effort when you know what you need to do. You might fail, but if you do try again. If you work hard and do your best it will work out or at least you will learn something.



The North Carolina Forage and Grassland Council 2013 Winter Conference Series

January 29, 2013
Johnston County
Extension Service
2736 NC 210
Smithfield

January 30, 2013
Edwin McGee Center
928 Fairplains Rd
North Wilkesboro

January 31, 2013
WNC Regional
Livestock Center
474 Stock Drive
Canton

Tradeshow and registration 12:30
Program 1:00—6:00 Social 6:00—7:00

2013 NCFGC Winter Conference Program

Tradeshow and Registration

Welcome and Introductions— Ronnie Holman

Dr. Chris Teustch, Virginia Tech Southern Piedmont AREC
"Building and Maintaining Soil Fertility in Times of High Fertilizer Costs"

Break and Tradeshow

Dr. Chris Teustch, Virginia Tech Southern Piedmont AREC
"Building Year Round Grazing Systems"

Break and Tradeshow

NCSU Extension Update

The Grazing Experts Panel
Moderated by Johnny Rogers

Questions, Evaluations and Door Prizes

NCFGC Social



NCFGC Winter Conference Registration

Cost: NCFGC Members=\$20 Non-members=\$30 Students=\$10

*Join NCFGC for \$25. New members will receive a free grazing stick
Pre-registration and on-site registration are the same price*

For more information on this event and other NCFGC activities contact:

North Carolina Forage and Grasslands Council 919-552-9111

Ronnie Holman— NCFGC President, 828-302-8659, Ronnie@hardrockbeefcattle.com

Mark Hucks—NCFGC President-elect, 252-289-4401, Mark_Hucks@ncsu.edu

NC FORAGE AND GRASSLANDS PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Happy Holidays! While Christmas and the New Year have recently occupied much of our time and energy, the day to day activities on our farming or ranching operations continue on. It is sometimes the thing that keeps us grounded when everything else is a blur around us. I have been spending a fair amount of time monitoring our stockpiled grass. Last year was the first we had gone through the winter without hay. So what happens when we raise our stocking rate a bit? We get no rain in the fall for grass regrowth! Our immediate past President, Johnny Rogers, summed it up pretty well when he said "Everything I try works when it rains and nothing works when it doesn't".

It has been a little while since the last newsletter and many things happened in 2012. We were able to host the first ever joint Forage and Grasslands Council Summer Tour August 23 at Triple Creek Ranch in Virgilina, Virginia. The tour was attended by over 250 participants, free of charge! We are working hard already for two potential events in late spring and early summer of 2013, one as a sponsor of a hay day and the other on Native Grass opportunities. In addition to these future events, our annual mid-Winter Conferences are rapidly approaching, January 29, 30 and 31.

Last year our conference topic was centered on building soil fertil-

ity and our featured speaker, Ray Archuleta challenged each of us with his presentation. This year Dr. Chris Teustch, from Virginia Tech, is our featured speaker and his topics will include Building Soil Fertility in Times of High Fertilizer Costs and Building Year Round Grazing Systems. Dr. Teustch will share a wealth of practical wisdom that all of us can easily implement in our own operations. Our conference locations are spread across the state and the presentations will be adapted to the local forages and opportunities. I hope each of you will make every effort to attend the meeting closest to you. Please view our website at <http://www.afgc.org/affiliate/northcarolina.php> for more information. Additionally, past issues of our Forager can be seen on the website. Lastly, the Board of Directors is always looking for opportunities to showcase the NCFGC and to help forage producers in North Carolina. If you have ideas we certainly want to hear from you. Feel free to call or email us at ncforage@gmail.com.

Good Grazing,

Ronnie

Ronnie

GUIDE TO FROST SEEDING

Frost seeding is one of the more easy and simple ways to establish clover in pastures. The theory of frost seeding is that during winter, the soil surface freezes and thaws causing the soil to "honeycomb" or loosen allowing the seeds to fall into the loose soil. With clover seed being such a small seed this allows for just enough soil to seed contact without the seed being buried too deep. One of the most common problems associated with a stand of clover failing to establish is that the seed is often drilled too deep. Frost seeding virtually eliminates this problem.

The optimal time of year to frost seed in North Carolina is in middle to late winter (January – early March). The first step to take is to test the soil pH level by conducting a soil test. Then you can apply lime and fertilizer as needed. The area

should be scouted for broadleaf weed pests and an appropriate herbicide applied. Refer to the label for herbicide residual info and plant-back times for clover. Existing forage needs to be grazed down close to reduce competition and to give better exposure to the soil surface. The normal seeding rate recommended when drilling should be increased 25% when frost seeding. When broadcasting it is also recommended to roll the seeded area with a cultipacker or similar roller device or allow cows to trample the seeded area.

When frost seeding, it is important that spring growth of perennial pasture grasses be kept in check by periodic grazing in order to reduce competition and allow sunlight to reach the young clover seedlings.

By Paul Beeson,
Pennington Seed





NC FORAGE & GRASSLANDS COUNCIL

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To receive **The Forager** via email, or to
submit a question or post an upcoming event:
contact: ronnie@hardrockbeefcattle.com

N.C. Forage and Grassland Council Membership Form

Name _____ Name of Operation _____

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E-mail _____ Phone: _____

Occupation: Farmer ____ Industry ____ Agency ____ Other _____

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Make check payable to: N.C. Forage and Grassland Council Mail to: NCFGC 2228 N. Main St., Fuquay-Varina, NC 27526

COMING EVENTS

2013

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

January 6-9: American Forage and Grasslands Council
Annual Meeting, Covington, Kentucky

January 29-31: NC Forage and Grasslands Council 2013
Winter Conference Series, Smithfield, N. Wilkesboro and
Canton. For more information see page 4 of this newslet-
ter.

February 14-15: NC Dairy Association Conference,
Hickory in conjunction with the NC Cattlemen's
Conference

February 15-16: NC Cattlemen's Conference, Hickory

February 15: NC Forage and Grasslands Council Annual
Meeting, Hickory. For more information contact
Ronnie@hardrockbeefcattle.com.

NCFGC Annual Meeting
Feb 15
Make plans to be there!

The NCFGC sponsors local forage events BUT hands needed to help the NCFGC !

Get involved and help the NCFGC promote grasslands, open space and profitable forage management! Contact the NCFGC for sponsorship of your forage event or volunteer to help with the NCFGC events! Contact Johnny Rogers or Ronnie Holman.