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Pasture Management Planning Sessions in May

Have a trained Grazing Mentor assess your grazing system and help you to **create a grazing plan** for your own farm. You'll also learn techniques to measure your farm's pasture productivity. There is no cost to attend, so make use of the Mentors! These will be held in Bridgewater at Peter Morine's on May 28th, in Windsor at Peter and Christine McClare's on May 29th, in Wallace at Graham Reid's on May 30th and in Mabou at William Cox's on May 31st. Start time is 7pm and this is open to all commodities. Contact Martine at m.degraaff@agrapoint.ca or call (902) 896-0277 for more information and to register.

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CropLinks

information on forages, corn and cereals

How Good is Your Pasture Water Source?

by Martine deGraaff, Coordinator, NS Pasture Improvement Initiative for SCIANs

Water is the most important nutrient for all livestock. Providing poor quality water can reduce potential productivity in ruminants, as well as causing serious health problems. The results from studies looking at the potential effects of fecal bacteria on cattle have shown varying productivity responses (from no negative effect to significant negative effects), and this is likely due to the large amount of variability within each cattle watering system. It is prudent to recognize that the potential of negatively impacting weight gains and livestock health is a definite possibility. Recent studies from Alberta have shown that cattle have 9% increased weight gain when drinking pumped pond water as compared to open access, and those that were offered well water gained 25% more than those drinking directly from ponds. Studies have also found that cattle have longer drinking times in open water than at pumped sources, even though the total amount ingested is the same.

Last summer, several pasture water sources in Nova Scotia were tested for *E. coli* through the Nova Scotia Pasture Improvement Initiative, with funding provided by the National Water Supply Expansion Program. *E. coli* is a type of fecal bacteria that can have negative effects on productivity and health and has been found to be of concern in some waterways and ponds in NS. This survey showed that on average, access points in both the ponds and streams we tested had higher than recommended livestock drinking levels of *E. coli* over the summer. The average level measured in the sources was 1,100 coliform forming units (cfu)/100 ml, whereas the recommended maximum is around 500 cfu/100 ml. Some sites had spikes as high as 165,000 cfu/100 mL, but hopefully this is rare. For comparison, wells had low levels of contamination (less than 20 cfu/100 mL).

Obviously there is room for improvement, and by fencing out the stream or pond water and supplying it via a pump or better yet, offering an alternate source of water such as from a well, you can increase your chances of improving livestock gains as well as protecting aquatic life. Funding is available through the FIF for fencing, wells and alternative watering systems.

Odds and Sods

Herbicide Update – Milestone the newly registered grass pasture and non-crop area herbicide is only going to be available in 10 litre jugs at a cost of \$1500 (even though 2.36L and 5L sizes are listed on the label). Dr. Glen Sampson of the NSAC has done trials with Milestone at the 0.25L/ha, 0.29 L/ha, and 0.29 L/ha Milestone plus 1.8 L/ha of 2-4D Amine rates and has good results in controlling Canada thistle, goldenrod, buttercup and several other weeds. Milestone also works well on burdock, common plantain, spotted knapweed, smooth bedstraw, and many other weeds.

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Odds and Sods (continued)

Herbicide Update (continued) Milestone has no grazing restrictions, and has a very brief activity in water so it needs to be mixed in the sprayer and applied within 1-2 hours. To look at the full label information on Milestone go to www.dowagro.com/canada/ and click on "Labels and Safety Data Sheets" and navigate through to Milestone.

Pesticide Re-Certification Points (PRCP) – Just a reminder on the AgraPoint website that Exam #4 "Field Sprayer Calibration" needs to be done by June 1st to get a quick 0.5 points. You can also receive 1.5 PRCP's by having Rick Hoeg with the Environmental Farm Plan come out and calibrate your field sprayer with you. Rick also will help you calibrate all types of manure spreaders which is important for Nutrient Management Planning and getting better manure utilization. Rick Hoeg can be booked by calling him at 890-1894.

Custom Manure Spreading – In Western NS a contractor is now available for custom spreading of solid manure and compost. This is R.D.L. Agri Waste Handling which is operated by David Van Hattem (698-0423 and 678-1528). David can spread "high octane manure" such as broiler and layer manure very accurately and is interested in buying poultry manure for organic livestock clients. Hendrik Van Hattem (David's cousin) will agitate, pump and spread any type of liquid manure in Western NS. He has been providing this heavily used custom service since 1991, and can be contacted at 847-1832 or 680-6634.

Farm Focus Article – check the Cultivator Column in the recent edition of Farm Focus. Here's a part of this article. ... **What is the right 1st cut forage harvest date for your farm?** Well this depends on where you're located in Nova Scotia and what type of ruminant critter you're feeding. If you have high producing dairy cows, feeder cattle/lambs, a fall or early winter beef calving or lambing situation, then harvest for high quality forage and give up some yield. **Time of 1st cut harvest** is by far the most important factor in determining stored forage quality (i.e. fibre digestibility, intake potential and forage energy). In fact upwards of 90% of forage quality is usually time of cut with the balance contributed by species differences, harvest - storage losses, growing conditions, and fertility. High quality 1st cut haylage target goals, particularly for dairy cows, are 28-31% ADF, and 40-44 % NDF for high percentage alfalfa mixtures OR 48-52% NDF for pure grass stands. In western Nova Scotia this means that in most years' our high % alfalfa mixtures, or high% orchardgrass – brome – reed canary – or fescue stands need to be harvested May 28 – June 4th. Fields that are predominately timothy or timothy-red clover would be harvested about a week later. High corn and grain prices dictate that we need to be better forage quality managers. **Good luck with your forage harvest.**

Management Tips for Overseeding into Existing Forage Stands

The practice of no-till seeding and overseeding forage seed into an existing forage stand to improve forage quality or to "thicken up" the stand has had mixed results. The critical factors are site selection, species choice and controlling competition.

Interseeding or overseeding seems to work best in well drained silty loam soils. Soil pH should be in the range of 6.0 to 6.5 and potassium and phosphorous levels should be medium plus or higher to help ensure ample

nutrients for seedling establishment. Overseeding or no-till interseeding seems to work best when the stand is more open and there is not a heavy sod. A more open stand allows for better soil to seed contact.

Both interseeding and overseeding is best done early in the spring. There is usually plenty of moisture in the early spring. Growth of the existing forage stand must be controlled if the new seedling is to have a chance at establishing. The new seedlings need lots of light to grow. Do not allow the growth of the existing stand to shade out the new seedlings. Grazing or taking an early cut of forage is the best way to prevent shading. Do not clip or graze too short however (below 5 cm), as this will damage the new seedlings.

Red Clover is the most shade tolerant and easiest to establish of the legumes. Alfalfa germinates well when drilled but the seedlings easily perish if the top growth of the existing forage stand is allowed to get too high for too long. White clover works well, but again the top growth needs to be kept in check. In regards to grasses; orchardgrass, meadow fescue, tall fescue and annual ryegrass are best suited for overseeding and interseeding into an existing stand. For more information on this topic check out the fact sheet on "No-till Interseeding into Existing Forage Stands" on the AgraPoint Website.

Feeding Your Flock — Challenges with Last Year's Forage

by Amy Sangster, Ruminants & Field Crops

Last season's conditions certainly presented a challenge to producing good quality hay. This time of year most producers are lambing and, during lactation, the ewe's nutritional requirements for both energy and protein are at the highest level of the whole production cycle of the ewe. It's important to ensure nutritional needs are met during lactation as milk production influences lamb growth rate from birth to weaning.

Since last year's forage was higher in ADF (fiber) and lower in TDN (digestibility), supplementation is likely necessary in order to meet the ewe's nutritional demands. During lactation the ewe is in a negative energy balance. She simply cannot eat enough forage to satisfy her energy requirement with a forage based diet. Although it's normal for ewes to lose weight during lactation, it is still important to body condition score and not let the ewes lose so much weight that they cannot regain it during the maintenance period, after weaning. Separating ewes into groups according to nutrient needs (BCS, singles, twins, etc.) allows for greater feed efficiency and ensures those animals needing an extra boost are able to get it.

Feeding is both an art and a science. Lab services at the Analytical Lab through the Department of Agriculture will do a standard forage analysis at a minimal cost. This is a good investment and will give you an idea of what you've got in your forage and how much you need to be supplementing.

Last season was also a good reminder of the role pasture can play in meeting nutritional demands and decreasing feed costs. The rainy days in June made it difficult to harvest hay but were fine for grazing. Take advantage of your pastures but realize they too need TLC in order to perform well. Ensure pastures have a proper rest period after grazing (often 20 to 40 days depending on grass re-growth) and pay attention to soil pH and soil fertility levels. Again, a lab analysis can provide you with an indication of what's really going on in your fields and is a good investment. This year ensure your ewes are able to regain any condition that was lost during lactation, so that after weaning they are ready for rebreeding. Pastures can play a key role in this.