Small farms forum

Livestock

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nitrogen that animals can use for growth.

In addition, citing research conducted recently in the U.S. and the Scandinavian countries, he said that adding formic acid to silage slows fermentation, thereby preserving nutrients in the silage. Further experiments are being conducted to see if these methods are practical for the small farms.

Since some forages have a low protein content and may vary in quality, a farmer often improves the growth of his forage-fed animals by supplementing their diets with limited amounts of grain, agricultural byproducts or commercially available feed additives. Further research, to determine the usefulness of feed supplements, would determine their role in small farm feeding programs, said Lynch.

As grasses mature, their nutritive value declines. Lynch reported that when Dr. S. Glenn of University of Maryland, College Park, applied a plant growth regulator, Mefluidide, to pastures in the spring, maturing of the grass was delayed. This technique has the potential of allowing grass-fed animals to make better weight gains on pasture for a longer time each season, commented Lynch.

Further research into growing livestock on forages will help the small-scale farmer supply cheaper, nutritious meat for America's dinner tables, said Lynch.

Norris

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society and are really subsidies to big agribusiness."

He also cited a recent U.S. Department of Agriculture report which indicated that farms reach efficiency at small or modest sizes and that "many commercial farms now exceed the size necessary to achieve all available cost efficiencies." The report further states that "society benefits little in terms of lower real food costs from further increases in farm sizes."

Norris told his audience "no broad indictment... of the community of large farmers" should be inferred from his comments. "Rather," he said, "the emphasis is on the need for constructive changes in large scale practices and on the importance of the smaller operation."

The national program proposed by Norris would be based first on a policy change that would re-direct some federal and state research funding toward small scale technological development, particularly with respect to integrated small scale production and energy generation. Statistics cited by Norris indicate that research aimed specifically at small farms at state Agricultural Experimental Stations represents less than half of one per cent of the total budget.

The other element of the national program would be a series of legislative actions designed to restore the feasibility of smaller farming units. The legislation would include:

- Increased availability of low-cost financing for small farms.
- Tax incentives designed to encourage the sale of land to small farmers.
- Tax credits for investments in agricultural centers which provide education, training and technology to small farmers.
- And the establishment of rural enterprise zones for a ten-year period: the zones would provide tax incentives and other means to stimulate the investments and other support needed to trigger the birth and profitable growth of small farms and small, rural-based businesses.

Small livestock and forage farms can use 'old-fashion' ideas

The best tool for today's small-scale livestock farmer may be up-to-date knowledge and old-fashioned savvy, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture agronomist William C. Templeton.

Templeton explained that for the creative small-scale livestocker, high energy costs and advanced technology have actually opened up options, rather than limited them.

"You don't always need lots of chemicals or the latest equipment to improve forage and livestock production," Templeton said. "For example, research shows that if seed is broadcast early in spring and existing vegetation is clipped, pastures can often be rejuvenated without sophisticated seeders and tractors."

Templeton is Director of USDA's Regional Pasture Research Laboratory in University Park. His remarks covered a broad range of forage and livestock management ideas, based on the latest research.

With increasing costs of nitrogen fertilizers, the role of legume plants — clover, alfalfa, vetch, and others — is being reassessed in forage management worldwide, because of the ability of legumes to add nitrogen to the soil, Templeton said.

Field tests have shown that pastures sown with a mixture of a grass and a legume are less weedy than pure-grass stands. Furthermore, combinations of pure-grass pastures (fertilized with nitrogen) and pastures of grass-legume mixtures provide continuous and relatively uniform livestock grazing from very early spring into early winter. In this way farmers don't need to store as much feed for winter.

Overseeding of legumes into run down or improverished pastures in humid climates can markedly improve forage production and quality. Field tests of seeding methods have shown that, without herbicide applications, yields from broadcasting legume seed can equal yields from the more energy-intensive method of drilling in the seed.

Templeton also reported that grazing and feeding trials have shown that sheep grow 25 percent faster and cattle 20 percent faster on legume-grass mixed pastures than on pure-grass stands.

Grazing two or more species of livestock together sometimes offers advantages. Cattle, sheep and goats have different diet preferences. In a current trial there seems to be a little overlap in the diets of sheep and goats. Goats tend to be useful in removing brush

For beef cattle, Templeton suggests that stocking twice as many cattle on pastures in spring, when plants grow fast, and making hay from ungrazed areas, helps insure that high amounts of feed will be eaten.

There appears to be a widespread misunderstanding among livestock producers of the real significance of "weeds", Templeton said. Some so-called weeds have nutritive values which compare favorably with those of commonly used cultivated forage plants.

Concerning soil, you can't cheat biology, Templeton said. Limestone and mineral fertilizers unfortunately are sometimes not used when soil tests clearly indicate that a change in the acidity or mineral content of the soil would make a considerable improvement in forage production.

Finally, successful livestock farming based on forages requires careful attention to both the plant and the animal aspects of the operation. Templeton said that many livestockers devote too much attention to one or the other, missing opportunities to integrate and thus improve their small-scale livestock farm.