

Pasture tour showcases warm season forage options

BY JACK HUBLEY
PARKESBURG — Farmers attending a Chester County Pasture Tour on June 14, were introduced to a number of forage crops well suited for growth during southeastern Pennsylvania's typically hot, dry summer months.

Sponsored by the Chester County extension, the tour began at the Parkesburg farm of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Cairns, where plots of warm season grasses are currently being tested through a cooperative program involving the USDA Pasture Research Lab, Penn State University and the Soil Conservation Service. The tests are being sponsored by Allied Chemical Company.

Farmers standing knee-deep in the lush test plots listened as Dr. Gerry Jung of the Pasture Research Lab explained why warm season grasses, including a variety of switchgrasses and bluestems, may be the answer to

forage needs during the searing summer months.

Jung explained that the grasses' modest water, nitrogen and phosphorus requirements, along with their optimum growing temperatures of 90 to 100 degrees, make them excellent summer forage alternatives.

"These grasses will grow under phosphorus levels that would kill cool season grasses," Jung pointed out, "and their low water requirements mean more efficient production of dry matter per unit water."

"When we withhold fertilizers we won't lose the stand," the researcher continued. "We've grown stands like this for five years without adding nitrogen."

But Jung was quick to note that the warm season varieties were not miracle grasses and would require proper management for optimum yields. He recommended leaving a 12-inch stubble after

grazing for quick recovery, and stated that the digestibility of warm season grasses is better for beef than for sheep.

Penn State agronomist Lynn Hoffman spoke briefly on weed control for warm season grasses, stressing that the time to control weeds is before seeding, "simply

because the farmer has a much larger arsenal of herbicides that are usable prior to planting."

Hoffman noted that warm season grasses' tendency to establish slowly leaves them wide open for competition.

"Once the seed is in the ground, weed control becomes much more

difficult," he cautioned.

The tour then moved to the Atglen farm of Joan and Bill MacCauley, where plantings of forage Brassicas were examined.

Following a talk on pasture renovation by Lynn Hoffman, Penn State agronomist Sid

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Penn State agronomist Dr. Lynn Hoffman (center) talks about pasture renovation amid a stand of Brassicas that he planted last month on the Atglen farm of Joan and Bill MacCauley.



Dr. Gerry Jung (far left) of the USDA Pasture Research Lab explains the virtues of warm season grasses to farmers during a Chester County Pasture Tour on June 14.

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