

## Foraging Around



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### Warm-Season Grasses What and How?

Warm-season perennial grasses such as switchgrass and the bluestems are not new to the Northeast. According to Dr. G.A. Jung of the U.S. Regional Pasture Research Lab, who has spearheaded recent research on these species, these grasses were widespread in the northeast before European settlers arrived. So why all the fuss over them now?

First of all they're known to be productive in July and August at the time cool season grasses are normally non-productive. They've also had the reputation among many cattlemen as being weeds. That's because through natural selection some of those early types became well adapted to our environment. And since they give the appearance under natural conditions as coarse, stiff-stalked grasses, they leave the impression they're low yielding, unpalatable to livestock and low in quality.

But research by Dr. Jung and associates over the past several years has proven that those earlier impressions just aren't right. In fact they've shown that these grasses are:

(1) highly productive from mid-June to the end of August with

excellent tolerance of drought and high temperatures.

(2) high in dry matter digestibility and intake at the vegetative growth stages. But, as is true with cool season grasses, they decline in quality as maturity advances.

(3) highly efficient users of water and very efficient users of N and P.

It has also been shown that these grasses are probably best used for pasture and the forage is better utilized by beef cattle than by sheep.

The warm-season grasses also get high marks from the Soil Conservation Service as stabilization plants on strip mine spoil and other critical areas. Once established they do well on a wide variety of soils from moderately deep and deep to rocky soils. For example switchgrass, a sod-forming grass, is tolerant of somewhat dry, to poorly drained soils but does poorly on shallow, very dry sites. The bunch type bluestems, on the other hand, seem to tolerate low rainfall conditions and are often found on droughty sites.

#### Blackwell Switchgrass

Of the warm-season grasses grown for forage, switchgrass has

probably gotten the most attention in Jung's research her in the Northeast. It has included variety comparison, no-till establishment, lime and fertilizer studies and grazing trials.

While other selections are getting attention, to-date the variety Blackwell appears best suited to the Northeast. But if you're a cattleman and you get serious about warm season grasses in your forage program don't overlook the Bluestems and Indiangrass. Switchgrass is ready to graze earlier than either Bluestem or Indiangrass. But the latter 2 may actually be higher in quality.

#### Getting Stands

While the potential of switchgrass and other grasses for mid-summer grazing has been determined, establishment has been both slow and inconsistent. No-till seeding trials showed that switchgrass varieties and seed lots vary in amounts of seed dormancy. To minimize stand establishment problems seedings must be made before mid-May. When early seedings are made the cold requirements of the seed is met and the seed then germinates when the soil gets warmer.

Seed quality and seed characteristics also make getting good stands a problem. Seeding results are normally better with a grain drill, roller-seeder, or no-till drill than by broadcasting. Switchgrass can be seeded with standard equipment. But for other warm seeded grasses unless debarbed they must be seeded with special equipment. Blackwell switchgrass in particular shows tolerance to atrazine. Thus, when pure plantings of Blackwell are made, and annual grasses and other weeds are expected to be a problem, the seeded area can be treated with two pounds per acre of atrazine to control competition from these other plants.

Jung's research and experiences by several growers who have used these grasses successfully suggest several practices to assure good

results. For example, don't put more than 25 percent of your available pasture into warm-season grasses. You may get better seasonal distribution of pasture by using more than one warm-season grass. But don't mix them.

Lime, phosphorus and potash requirements for these grasses are nearly the same as for cool-season grasses. But avoid nitrogen applications during the seeding year to minimize weeds and other plant competition. Also, for established stands keep N rates on the light side and don't apply N until after warm-season grasses start spring growth.

Good grazing management is a

must, too. Rotational grazing is desirable and over-grazing is disastrous. Always leave about six inches of stubble in the field when you move the cattle.

Yields of warm-season grasses can be high (four to six tons of hay equivalent/A) and this production comes during a short period from late June through August. Thus for cattlemen, the addition of native warm-season grasses to your existing cool-season grass or grass-legumes pasture systems can result in more evenly distributed forage production over the grazing season. They will also enable beef producers to develop a grazing system that better meets the nutritional needs of beef cattle during July and August.

## Comments requested on turkey inspection proposal

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Department of Agriculture has extended the public comment period on its Nov. 8 proposal for a new slaughter inspection system for turkeys.

According to Donald L. Houston, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, the comment period will end Feb 21 rather than Jan. 7.

"Since the turkey industry is very busy during the holiday season, we have granted a request to extend the comment period on the proposal," said Houston. "The extra 45 days will allow interested parties sufficient time to study the proposal and to develop comments and supporting data."

The proposal would establish a voluntary and alternate method of inspecting turkeys after slaughter. The method-known as the "new turkey inspection system"--is

similar to one now in effect for chickens.

Comments on the proposal should be sent, in duplicate to: FSIS Hearing Clerk, USDA, Room 2637-South, Washington, D C 20250.


A notice of this action appears in the Jan. 3 Federal Register.

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