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those little things that we sometimes take for granted — the seed. Is there much of a difference or is it just best to buy the same seed that we've been buying? How do I know if there is anything better? Will it work on my farm?

These and many other questions cause hesitation and fear rather than "consumer confidence." After all, most of the seeds look alike and come in similar packages — usually a white 50-pound bag.

• Step 1: Assume that you don't know or have it all — seek out something better. While you are assuming, assume that all the research and years of selection have resulted in improved varieties of seed that will yield better, feed better, and meet your specific needs more direct.

Let's use tall fescue as an example. Maybe you've used a public variety called Kentucky-31. Do you know how it got its name? Kentucky-31 was named after the place and date of its origin. That's right! It was discovered in 1931 in the foothills of Kentucky.

Now wouldn't you think that 66 years and hundreds of thousands of dollars of research would generate at least one or two improved tall fescue varieties? Of course! And it has. In fact, there are improved varieties from all around the world. Fawn from Oregon, Advance from New Zealand, Puego from Holland, and many more. By the way, most of the newer forage tall fescues don't have a

lick of toxic endophyte in them. So I ask, why is it that when it comes to choosing a new tall fescue, why do you choose Kentucky-31? Price, right? Well, you get what you pay for. No more. No less.

Then there's ryegrass. My what a difference the new varieties are from the old Lion perennial ryegrass. Today, you can get endophyte-free tetraploids that not only yield, but provide an unbelievably high feed value. With relative feed values (RFV) exceeding 135 you can be assured that your animals will be gaining as they are grazing. Survivability has been a downfall for ryegrass, but recent tests have shown that some varieties, like Tonga tetraploid perennial ryegrass, are also very persistent. Combination of annual, intermediate, and perennial ryegrasses are now being used with great success, too.

The choice continues in the orchardgrasses. Did you know that there are four different types of orchardgrasses? Some are best for hay while others are ideal for pasture. Take a dwarf variety like Tekapo or Wana orchardgrass from New Zealand. This type of orchardgrass is a site and a wonder to anyone who has only been accustomed to the traditional upright varieties like Latar and Potomac. These new dwarf varieties LIKE to be grazed. They DON'T get clumpy. They DO fill in. I have seen Tekapo plants with a nearly two-foot diameter base. These varieties have very low, protected crowns that can with-

stand intense grazing. Down to the nub chomping, I call it.

Now here's where one of your biggest dilemmas comes into play. How do you find out about all these new varieties? The Book of Proverbs says that there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors. I like to hear a story at least twice before I open my wallet. Gather information in a multitude of ways. Do some independent research; explore the internet; go to educational seminars, grazing conferences, and trade shows; make friends with progressive locals (you know, the weird ones who are always trying something new!); and finally, listen to salespeople who seem to have done their homework. Also, subscribe to pasture related journals, like the Stockman Grass Farmer.

Currently, my favorite tool is the internet. I am on a newsgroup called Graze-I, I regularly search out university and private sites, and I use the internet to provide information to my customers via our company web site. This resource is amazingly unlimited.

One caveat. Proverbs also states that only a fool listens to everyone. Don't take all advice as gospel.

• Step 2: Walk, don't run — make small changes. Best to compare old with new and new with new. Remember Step 1? Assume that you don't know everything about this new variety that you are planting. When you plant it, try a few different combinations.

Take seeding rates, for example. Oregon State Universi-

ty has recommended that 1 seed per every square inch is a good rule of thumb to use when planting new pastures. Using this recommendation, one simply needs to know how many seeds per pound the new variety averages, what percentage of the final mix he wants to have of that component and do the math. (By the way, there are 6,272,640 square inches in an acre.) However, when you start to mix varieties, some species can dominate others. And, like all rules of thumb, not every situation or variety fits perfectly. So it is a good idea to try a few different combinations.

This is a good rule for not only buying new pasture grass varieties, but for many other activities. Do you have a new vendor knocking at your door? It doesn't hurt to try them out in a small way, but don't go and abandon every other relationship you've developed just yet.

New processes and procedures, technologies, and tools are the same way. Go to the most skilled craftsman you know and ask him how he got to where he is today. Assuredly, he will tell you that he kept working at his trade, perfecting and refining. Look at all you do on your farm the same way. Perfect your pasture management a little more each day. Try seeding a new variety in one section. Apply fertilizer a couple of different ways. Turn at least part of your farm into a mini experimental station.

• Step 3: Get on a routine of regular pasture improvement. Similar to Step 2, but different in focus. If a farmer can get committed both mentally and financially to improve his pastures each year, he will indeed be successful. He who gathers a little at a time will accumulate great wealth, says the Book.

This principle applies well to farming. When we fail to

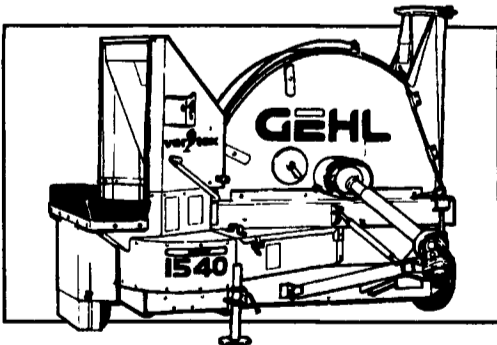
maintain our fields, our equipment, even our relationships, they all seem to naturally fall apart. Better to be committed to regular maintenance and improvements than to wait for the pasture to become a wasteland. Set aside funds on a regular basis to be used to purchase an annual amount of seed for re-seeding. Have a seed budget, just like one for fertilizer and equipment repairs. A few hundred dollars each year will most likely yield a rapid return within the year, but non-budgeted seed usually doesn't get bought.

• Step 4: Get on a routine of regular mental improvement. As a farmer, you are competing against other farmers. In today's farming, you must be knowledgeable. Don't think that you can be successful tomorrow on today's smarts. Make friends with other successful operators, attend grazing conferences, field days, and other educational events on a regular basis.

Also, spend your money buying from informed and informative suppliers. I recently bought a sign that now hangs in our office. It reads, "Price, Quality, Service. Pick Any Two." Remember that when you purchase products from suppliers that are trying to help you, you are investing in your future. These are the folks you want to keep in business. Especially with today's mergers and buyouts, many companies are becoming mass merchants. Support the guy who sells you and GIVES you information — even when his price is higher.

We all want "Perfect Pastures." We'd like perfect marriages, perfect kids, and perfect farms. And just as it is with the rest of life, the only way to have a perfect pasture is to perfect our pasture. If we do nothing, then all we have is what we have . . . except for a few weeds that might blow in.

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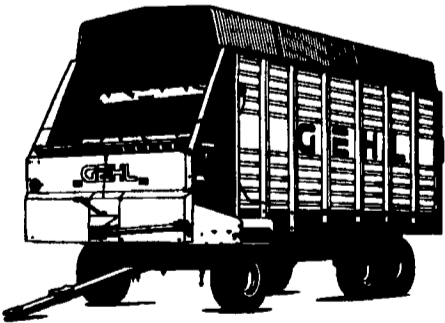


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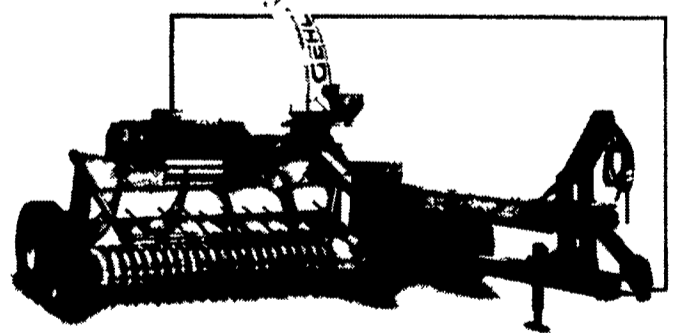
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