

# Cattle Learn To Select Best Forages

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bud and bloom stage, the less forage quality of the plant. The more the plant matures, and the longer the season stretches on, the more forage quality declines.

Legumes will provide higher quality forages overall than grasses, though producers shouldn't leave out the potential for warm-season grasses in a drought. And weeds have their forage potential, to some extent, especially under rough drought conditions.

"My favorite warm season weed is crabgrass," noted Gerrish.

But coming up with a definition of "weed" can be difficult, since some of the broadleaves and grass weeds have forage merit. The question producers need to ask themselves: is the weed displacing productive forage? But under drought conditions, it would help having a legume.

In Missouri, Gerrish noted that red clover, which can withstand drought because of its deeper root over white clover, is interseeded in places at about six pounds per acre. Clover is regularly broadcast as frost seed after the last snow and proves to be a high-quality legume and one of the most cost-efficient ways to boost forage quality in existing pasture stands.

The additional value of the clover component in the forage can add up to \$8-\$9 of real value every year. It can prove to be "one of the best paybacks on the dollar in the beef cow/calf feeding business, just by overseeding it," Gerrish said.

Gerrish spoke about ways to improve pasture stands.

There are no simple solutions to dealing with problem pastures, according to the University of Missouri grazing specialist and grazer. "You need to take a systematic approach to the problems and try to correct several of these factors," he said.

In many cases, simply spreading nitrogen down is a quick, easy, but ultimately lost payoff for turning the quality of forages around. What producers need to do is soil test and see if soil pH using lime or bringing phosphorous levels to optimum levels can be done cost-effectively.

However, in many cases, the animal returns most of the nutrients to the land. Often those nutrients are displaced in shady areas, under trees, or near water sources. So managing that distribution of manure is key.

Gerrish noted that a 1,100-pound beef cow puts out about \$100 pounds



Speakers at the Pennsylvania Grazing and Forage Conference included, from left, Bill Stout, John Caldwell, J.B. Harold, and Steve Ford.

of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium per year.

About two-thirds of that is dropped near a water trough or a shade tree — nonproductive areas of a grazing operation.

Gerrish resumed speaking about improving pasture quality through interseeding legumes. But when doing so, producers need to select a legume

that fits the soil environment and "slowly build up the fertilization over time," Gerrish said, "in small increments over a long period."

To do so, control competition growth by grazing, clipping, burning, tillage, or by chemical methods. Interseed legumes, frost seeding effectively, using broadcast and harrow, or no-till drill. "Hoof and tooth" methods, using cattle to tramp seed in, can take too long.

Manage grazing through the application of the proper stocking rate, provide a rest period so the plants can recover, and don't graze too short or too late in the fall. Gerrish noted that he stops grazing 30-40 days before frost.

For legume interseeding, spring works better. For grass, late summer interseeding is best.



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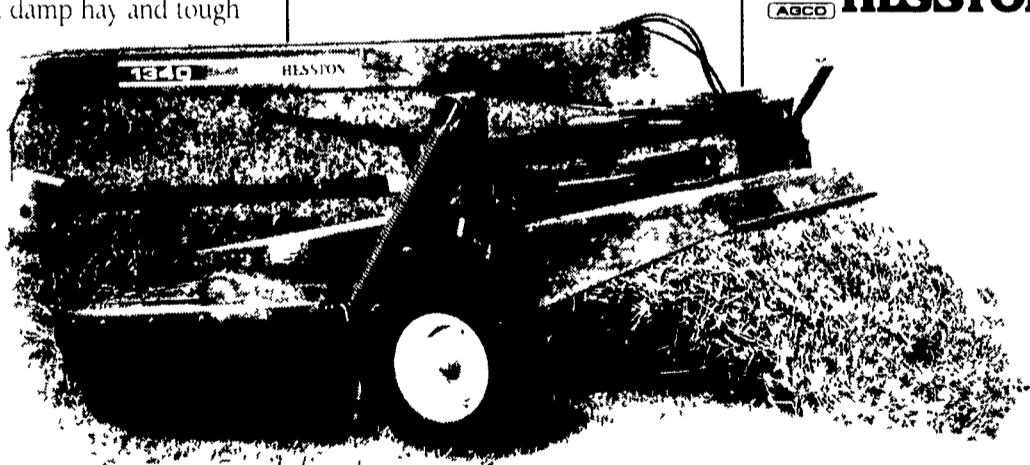
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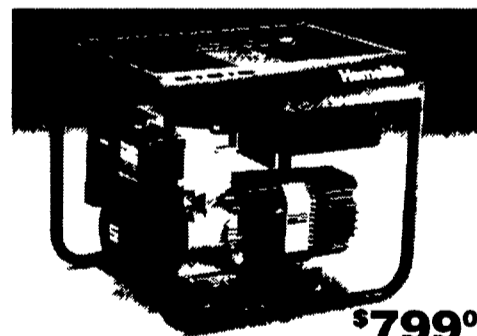
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