

Virginia Grazing School Draws Diverse Group

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Virginia Correspondent
HARRISONBURG, Va. —

Virginia Tech forage experts conducted the 2nd Annual Virginia Grazing School here March 20-21. Owing to heavy rains, they revised the agenda after a scheduled farm visit had to be postponed.

"We made the executive decision to not stand in a mud hole," said Ray Smith, Virginia forage extension specialist.

The next day — the first full day of spring — turned out clear and sunny for visiting the local farm where participants were asked to plan a grazing system using field and soil maps.

"Goal Setting and Planning" was a key topic offered during the indoor part of the program. This session was designed to help the farmer determine his or her status, where he/she wants to go and, finally, how to get there.

In another session, Chris Teutsch, forage researcher, spoke on plant physiology. Teutsch covered plant response to grazing, drought and other environmental factors; photosynthesis, transpiration and respiration; and carbohydrate production and use.

"Where carbohydrates are determined how you manage that plant," Teutsch said, discussing the location of a plant's carbohydrate reserves in relation to its ability to produce regrowth.

Ray Smith outlined various forage species characteristics, including the response of plant species to grazing and other stresses; the optimal management for different forage species; competition in pastures, and identifying forage species that help extend the grazing season.

Smith noted the recent discovery of a 100-foot-long alfalfa root in a Colorado mine. The plant obviously had found the moisture it was seeking deeper in the earth.

"Alfalfa in Virginia," Smith said, "probably would not



Ray Smith, Virginia Tech forage extension specialist, is pictured showing matua prairie grass.

reach a 100-foot depth as it did in Colorado because our soil is too acidic."

Smith also conducted a session on the hands-on identification of forage species. He said that kura clover is probably the most difficult of the clovers to establish.

Jon Repair, extension forage agent, spoke on the importance of having fresh nitrogen-fixing bacteria to inoculate legume seeds.

"It's better to inoculate seed yourself than to buy seed that is pre-inoculated," Repair

said. A problem with buying pre-inoculated seed is that farmers often don't know the amount of time that passed since it was inoculated.

Mike Phillips, a grazier near Harrisonburg, spoke about his experiences with bermudagrass.

The recent, prolonged Virginia drought was the springboard for Phillips' bermudagrass experiments.

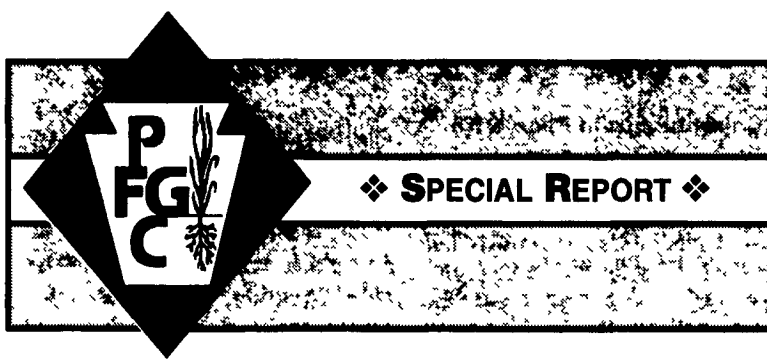
The bermudagrass he seeded survived two winters before this past winter. It remains to be seen what impact this year's colder-than-usual weather may have had.

"This was the winter to prove whether or not bermudagrass is cold-tolerant," Phillips said.

No matter how well bermudagrass does for Phillips, he said he will continue to grow cool season forages such as alfalfa.

Other topics explored at the school included soils and fertility; forage quality; and the economics of forage systems and risk assessment.

Beside Smith, Teutsch, and Repair, Virginia Tech specialists contributing to the school included Joe Tritscher, small ruminant extension specialist; Greg Mullins, nutrient management specialist; Gordon Groover, extension economist; Glen Johnson, NRCS state forage agronomist; and Susan Gay, agricultural engineering specialist.



Stream Bank Fencing And Riparian Buffers Benefit Farmers

David Wise
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Stream bank fencing and buffers can benefit livestock producers in a number of ways. These include:

- Improved herd health. Clean, dry cattle are healthier cattle. Wet, muddy conditions increase the risk of mastitis, foot problems, and other serious illnesses. Controlled access at stabilized crossings also reduces foot and leg injuries from steep, slippery banks, and rock creek bottoms.

- Improved biosecurity. Water is a very effective means for spreading many disease organisms. Efforts to control disease on one farm may be undone if livestock have unlimited contact with a stream used by other herds upstream. Stream bank fencing can improve biosecurity on the farm and for other producers downstream.


- Better drinking water for livestock. Milk cows are particularly sensitive to drinking water quality and will decrease their intake if water

quality is poor. Better water quality promotes high intake, which is needed for higher levels of milk production.

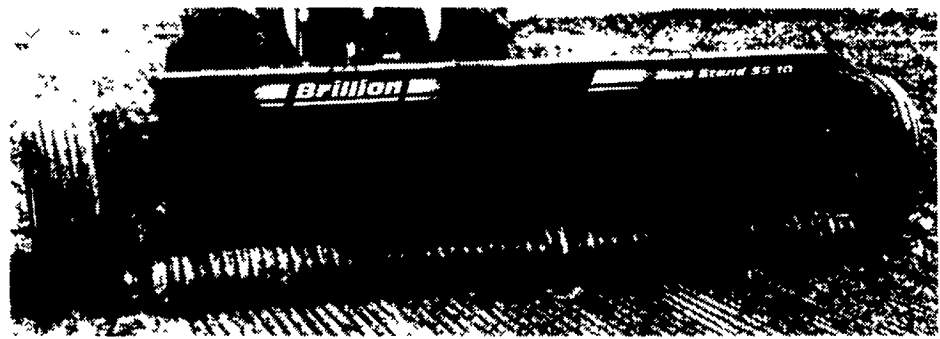
- Options for pasture management. Stream bank fencing splits a typical pasture in two. Once the electrified stream bank fence is in place, creating additional paddocks is cheap and easy. Improved management options can significantly increase the efficiency of pasture use.

- Good public relations. Agencies and the public are increasingly aware of farm management, especially how it affects streams. Stream bank fencing is a very noticeable commitment to clean water and a strong "good neighbor" policy.

- Stewardship of the land. Buffers provide habitat for a host of wildlife from songbirds to waterfowl to game animals. Improvements to fish habitat are large and rapid. Reduced bank erosion protects property like fields, buildings, lanes, and bridges.



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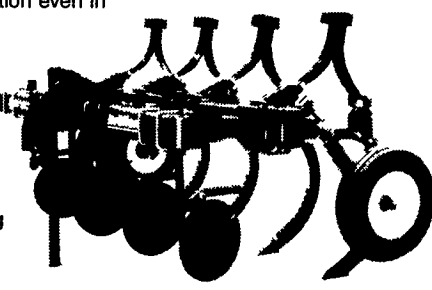
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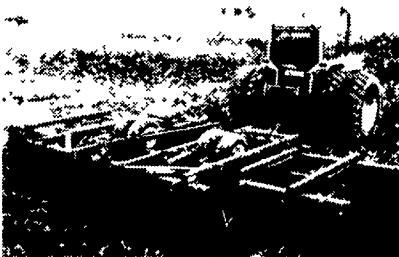
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