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## Sowing the seeds of pasture renovation

April 29th, 2008 · No Comments

By MIKE MILLER OSU Extension Medina County

Like many Ohio farmers, livestock producers looking to re-seed or renovate their pasture paddocks after last year's drought and wet winter are facing high input and seed costs. Ohio State University Extension educator Rory Lewandowski offers a variety of management strategies to help producers ease back into productive forages this spring.

Between last year's drought that led to overgrazing of pastures and the late fall and winter rains that kept soils saturated, leading to trampled and muddy pastures, there is a need on many farms to re-seed or renovate at least some pasture paddocks, said Lewandowski with OSU Extension in Athens County. Like every other input cost, the price of grass and legume seed has increased, but there are options available that allow abused pasture paddocks to recover and become productive again.

Lewandoski offers the following management tips for producers this growing season:

o Do nothing and let the pastures recover naturally. It's a low-cost option, at least in terms of out-of-pocket expenses, but time is the drawback, Lewandowski said. Something will re-grow in muddy, trampled paddocks if given enough time.

If producers have the land base to set aside those torn up paddocks through the spring and early summer, they will renovate themselves. What grows, and whether or not it's desirable forage, depends on the seed bank in the soil.

o Seeding offers the possibility to increase pasture productivity and to bring a new mix of forages into the pasture paddock. There have been advances in forages, such as grasses and legumes bred to better tolerate grazing, and genetics that allow plants to be more palatable and productive, Lewandowski said.

A paddock that was overgrazed during last year's drought and/or torn up during this winter's soggy conditions may be ideal to bring some new and improved forage genetics into the pasture mix.

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o If seeding, aim for 30 percent evenly distributed legume species to counter high nitrogen prices. At this level, supplemental fertilizer nitrogen should not be needed. If the area to be planted needs to get a quick cover due to erosion concerns and/or some quicker production is needed for grazing, then include some annual ryegrass seed in the seeding mixture, he said. Adding about 4 pounds of annual ryegrass per acre should provide some early cover and an early grazing pass because it is quick to germinate and grow.

o If seeding, make sure soil pH and soil fertility are ideal for forage productivity. Soil pH should be above 6.0, with a goal of 6.5. Soil phosphorus level should be at 25 parts per million, and soil potassium should be at 100 to 120 ppm, Lewandowski said.

If the soil is not close to these numbers, it may be worthwhile to put off a spring seeding, apply the needed lime and fertilizer this spring and aim for a late summer seeding.

“Seed is not cheap. You want to make sure that seed, once planted, has a chance to become a productive plant and maximize its genetic potential.”

o Do not seed too deep. Many stand failures can be traced back to planting the forage seed too deep. Seed should be planted about one-quarter of an inch deep. It is better to err on the side of planting shallower rather than deeper.

o Pay attention to seeding rates. Check the label to determine the percentage of pure live seed and adjust seeding rates accordingly. For example, according to the Ohio Agronomy Guide, an orchardgrass, red clover and white clover mixture would be seeded at a per acre rate of 7 pounds of orchardgrass, 4 pounds of red clover and 2 pounds of white clover on a pure live-seed basis.

o Inoculate the seed with the correct rhizobial bacteria, especially if the specific legume species being planted has not been in the pasture paddock for a few years.

o Producers should complete Northern Ohio spring seedings by early May.

It takes about six to eight weeks for a new seedling to become established. Ideally the new seedlings can develop a good root system while soil moisture is plentiful and before summer temperatures arrive. This is the reason behind setting the spring seeding date target around April 20, Lewandowski said.

After about eight weeks of growth, or toward the end of June, producers can begin to manage the stand using good rotational grazing principles.

Miller is the agriculture and natural resources agent of Ohio State University Extension, Medina County. For more information, call Ohio State University Extension Medina County at 330-725-4911, 330-336-6657 or 330-225-7100, ext. 9237. Visit the Extension's Web page at [www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~medi](http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~medi).