

Extension Ag News

Fall 2016

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Editor's Note

This is the Fall issue of a four-county agriculture newsletter. Agriculture Extension Agents serving Albemarle, Fluvanna, Greene and Louisa Counties are collaborating to offer in-depth information on a wide variety of topics. **Extension Ag News** is published quarterly.

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Preparing Your Cattle Herd for Economical Feeding with Lower Calf Prices

by Charles A. Rosson, VCE-Louisa

Hay making was an extreme challenge with the excessive rains we had during the prime hay production season in May and early June this year. While many farmers produced large amounts of hay, much of the first cutting will be low in protein, low in TDN and very high in indigestible fiber. Hopefully we will be blessed with a better quality second cutting of hay this fall but one important strategy you don't want to forget is stockpiling your tall fescue pastures. It is a very cost effective way of stretching your feed dollars especially in the face of much lower feeder calf prices than we have been accustomed to the last couple of years. Stockpiling is one of the most efficient ways to utilize tall fescue. Simply put, stockpiling means to store up fescue pasture growth from August until mid-fall and then to graze this growth during late fall and early winter. Tall fescue maintains quality better than any other forage grass grown in Virginia under stockpiling and cattle rarely show fescue toxicosis grazing stockpiled fescue pasture. Follow these steps for successful stockpiling: 1) Graze or mow the fescue down to 2 to 3 inches during early to mid-August. Grazing or mowing removes low quality summer growth and allows the plant to produce new high quality leaves. Make sure to remove animals once the pasture is grazed down because overgrazing slows recovery growth and reduces the amount of stockpiled forage. 2) Top-dress pure stands of tall fescue with 60 to 80 lbs. N per acre during early to mid-August. Without a N application forage yield and protein will be lower. This is also a good time to apply phosphorus, potassium and lime according to soil test recommendations. In the absence of a soil test, apply 40 to 60 lbs. each of phosphorus and potassium per acre. Optimal growth will occur when pH is maintained above 6.0. N may be reduced if clover is present. 3) Keep livestock off this pasture until the fall growth of other pastures is grazed (usually November or

December), then turn the animals onto the stockpiled tall fescue. 4) If pastures run short in the fall, consider feeding hay during favorable weather from September to November. This allows stockpiled tall fescue to accumulate and stretches the supply of grazable forage. 5) Where possible, stockpiled tall fescue fields should be strip grazed and stocked heavily enough to graze down the accumulated

growth in each paddock in 7 to 14 days or less. This allows the forage to be fully utilized without excessive trampling and wastage. Since tall fescue does not regrow in the winter, a back fence is not essential when strip grazing stockpiled growth. Why kill weeds? Weeds are a problem in our pastures for many reasons. They compete with the desirable grasses and legumes for nutrients. They are often unpalatable; livestock will not eat them so less feed is available. Some weeds are toxic to livestock while others can cause injuries. <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/418/418-050/418-050.html>

You might ask “Is it cost effective to stockpile cool season grasses for grazing in late fall and winter?” In his article “*Does Stockpiling Fescue Pay*”, Henry Snodgrass of the VA Tech Ag Economics Department did a comparison of stockpiled pasture versus hay and grain supplementation. In Table 1, the cost of supplying a unit of digestible energy to a ruminant from different sources is compared with grazed pasture having an index value of 100.

	Cost Ratio
Grazed Pasture	100
All Hay	160
Alfalfa	152
Timothy Hay	161
Silage	195
Dehydrated forages	320
Grains and concentrates	457

Table 1. Relative economic efficiency of supplying a unit of digestible energy to ruminant livestock.

Source: *1996 Missouri Grazing Manual*

While the ratios shown above may change some with fluctuations in price of feed grains and hay, they give a good idea of the relative cost. In the process of harvesting and feeding hay, you are increasing the cost roughly 50 to 60 percent. This cost does not account for the opportunity cost of time, which could be used in other productive tasks.

Extending the grazing season using cool season grasses and legumes can be one of the most cost-effective practices available to farmers. In Virginia, this practice is most often accomplished by stockpiling tall fescue in the late summer and early fall. Even though the fescue shows a response to nitrogen applications up to 120 lb./A., the availability of moisture may limit the utilization of N applied at these higher rates. Standard recommendations in Virginia are to apply 60 to 80 lb. of N, August 1 to September 15. A conservative response to an application of 80 lb. of N would be 1200 lb. dry matter, which would cost .04/lb. of dry matter produced. Compare this to the cost of hay you produce. An average cost for producing clover - orchard grass hay in Virginia is .06/lb. dry matter. Again, this cost does not include the cost of feeding the hay to the livestock nor the savings in dollars and time, add in the quality of forage typically found in a stockpiled tall fescue. **Typically, the quality of the stockpiled forage is as good as or better than the "good hay" in your barn.**

<http://www.sites.ext.vt.edu/newsletter-archive/fmu/1997-06/stockfescue.html>

In conclusion, stockpiling fescue in Virginia is an excellent way to stretch your feed resources in your cattle operation. Stockpiling lowers your out of pocket costs as you don't have to harvest the feed, the cows do it for you. The quality of the stockpiled fescue grass is very good from a TDN and protein perspective as well as lowering your need for expensive hay.

THE KEY TO USING ELECTRIC FENCE

by Carrie Swanson, VCE-Albemarle/Charlottesville

I have used electric fence for years to contain my horses, but last year I started a small herd of meat goats and discovered that I didn't know a darn thing about electric fence -- or at least not enough to contain the goats! There's a saying that if you want to know whether your fence will hold goats, throw a bucket of water at it...if the water goes through, so will the goats! This isn't true, but for a while, I believed it. I haven't had a goat escape in over a year, so let me share what I've learned...

As with all fencing, animals must be able to see it and respect it in order for it to be effective. I like electric rope, tape or polywire for visibility over smooth or bare wire. In my experience, tape gets caught in high winds and needs re-tensioning more often...so while it has better visibility, I use an electric rope with my horses because I'm going across wide-open fields. I've found that 3 strands is plenty on perimeter fence and use two strands for cross-fencing. For the goats, I use 4-5 strands of polywire...they don't run as much or as fast through the woods and scrub brush, so they have plenty of time to see it.

Next they have to respect the fence, which means it has to shock them. Every time they touch it. For horses and cattle, who are heavy, and therefore well-grounded, this is easy. Goats (and sheep) are a different matter.

Properly grounded electric fence delivers a shock when touched because the animal (or person) touching it completes the circuit. The fence charger sends a pulse down the wire, which goes through the animal, into the ground, up through the ground rods and back to the charger. Most chargers recommend at least 3 ground rods, at least 6 feet long, and 10 feet apart. Follow the directions for your charger.

Goats who are not trained to electric fence tend to stick their heads through the wires, rather than investigating with their nose (like horses and cattle). This not only means that the fence must be hot enough to shock through hair or wool, but also means that when they do get shocked, they can easily get horns caught (causing them to jump forward through the fence, until they learn not to touch it). For this reason, I do not recommend electric netting for horned goats.

Remember when I said that cattle and horses are well-grounded because they weigh a lot and have small feet (more lbs per square inch)? Yep, not the case with goats. Especially kids. So, the electricity has a harder time getting through the animal and into the soil. Plus, the conductivity of the soil changes depending on moisture...which explains why my young goats stayed behind the fence until the beginning of August last year, but then started walking through it like they weren't getting shocked anymore. Because they weren't.

What I didn't know about was the importance of Joules. While voltage equals the strength of the shock or pulse, joules are basically the force with which that electric pulse is sent down the wire. The higher the joules, the more "resistance" that pulse can power through. Resistance comes from many things, including the type of wire used, the length of fence and the number of strands, the amount of brush or grass touching the wire, the animal the pulse travels through (the smaller the animal, the more resistance) and the soil (dry soil means more resistance). The more joules a fence charger has, the more fence line it can handle and the greater its ability to power through brush, to work in dry soil conditions and to give a shock to smaller animals.

So, I traded in my solar charger for a plug-in unit with three times as many joules and it solved the problem! I also recommend keeping a fence testing light clipped on the fence somewhere you'll see it at least twice a day. It enables me to quickly glance at the fence and know that it's working. I also have a grounded wire (bare wire strung directly to the t-posts with no insulators) as the bottom strand next to the house where they test the fence the most. This helps ground even the smallest kid in the driest soil conditions, so they learn faster and stay in the fence.

Electric fencing is a great low-cost option in many cases, but it does require some maintenance and it must be installed properly. My goats are available for rent if you'd like to test your fence!



Photo by Carrie Swanson

PESTICIDE RECYCLING PROGRAM!

by Sarah Weaver Sharpe, VCE-Greene

Do you have unwanted pesticides that are around your house, garden, or farm that you don't want any more, don't know what they are, and don't know what to do with them? Luckily for you, there is a pesticide recycling program coming up this fall that you can dispose of and recycle those unwanted chemicals.

Keeping unwanted or unknown chemicals around can pose a danger to you, your family members, pets and other animals, and the environment. These chemicals could leak out of the containers that they are in and leach into the ground and into the water. If they are unknown chemicals, they may be dangerous to handle and you may not know, or remember, the proper way to handle them. They could also be expired which could make them less effective or they could become more dangerous.

The Virginia Pesticide Disposal Program, a partnership between the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and Virginia Cooperative Extension, offers recycling sites for the disposal of unwanted and outdated pesticides that are currently stored by agricultural producers, licensed pesticide businesses, certified applicators, golf courses, and homeowners. Acceptable pesticides: agricultural pesticides, commercial pesticides, homeowner pesticides, weed and feed, pesticide dilutions. Unacceptable are: medical waste, radioactive waste, ammunition, tires, biological waste, contaminated waste, paint, oil, fertilizer, and batteries. If you have unknown pesticides of 50 pounds solid or 5 gallons of liquid, VDACS will work with you to get the pesticides recycled, but will be accepted.

Collections will be held September 14- Rockingham County Fairgrounds; October 10- Orange Madison Coop, Orange; October 11- Ivy Materials Utilization Center; October 12- CFC Farm and Home Center, Culpeper.

All pesticides that you would like to recycle must be registered with your local Extension Office **no later than September 15**. For more information, or to register your unwanted pesticides, contact your local Extension Agent.



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Boxwood Blight Update

Boxwood blight has recently made news in the Central Virginia area. There have been multiple confirmed cases diagnosed by the VT Plant Disease Clinic. Boxwood Blight is a fungus that has sticky spores and is transmitted by spray hoses, tools, clothing, shoes and vehicles. The fungus can be transported in soil and by animals moving through infected plants. The symptoms include leaf spots, black streaking on stems, and severe defoliation. Other diseases can be confused with boxwood blight, and laboratory confirmation is required before making a positive diagnosis.

English and American boxwood are very susceptible to the disease. The primary way the disease moves is on infected plant material, so avoid introducing diseased plant material, especially if susceptible boxwood is already present. If you hire landscapers, be sure that they sanitize tools and equipment between properties. You should only hire landscapers who demonstrate awareness of the disease and are implementing measures to prevent transport from one property to another.

If you are thinking about adding new boxwood plants to your property, be sure to purchase boxwood from a nursery or retail outlet that has purchased boxwood exclusively from a boxwood producer in the Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Program. You can also purchase cultivars with resistance to boxwood blight—such as Green Beauty, Nana, Golden Dream, Northern Emerald, and Wedding Ring. You also want to closely monitor all boxwood plants in areas where new boxwood has been introduced within the past year for symptoms of disease.

If you think that you have symptoms of Boxwood Blight, collect symptomatic branch samples with at least a few green leaves still attached. Double bag the samples and take them to your local Extension Office to be sent to the Plant Disease Clinic for proper diagnosis.

Performance Measures for Sheep and Goat Producers, What Are They?



by John Thompson, VCE Fluvanna

Recently the sheep industry has been working to develop and publish EPD's for use with animal evaluation and selection. EPD's are the primary performance measure "report" for Cattle folks, and has been for many years. EPD's (Expected Progeny Differences) have revolutionized most cattle breeds, and helped commercial cattle producers make fast changes in performance, and consistency of product sold (think quality of meat, OR quality of heifers sold as replacements). EPD's are based on farmer's record keeping in a consistent and reportable format, and feeding those records into a database for evaluation and use. Goat folks, we are out in the cold as yet!

So what does that all mean to you, a sheep and goat producer? That you need to keep good, consistent records within your flock/herd. Then you can use those records to make culling and selection decisions annually. Some performance measures are easy to see the importance of – such as birthing records. single, twin or greater multiples! If a ewe or doe year-after-year throws singles, that measurement says she may be on the cull list. But how do you evaluate her ability to provide milk? Udder size? Yes, and no. That is descriptive, but won't tell the whole story. Really large udders often are injured in the field, so larger *can* be a negative. What about weaning weight? Now there is a measure that can be very indicative of mom's ability to provide. How about determining if the lamb or kid was just a "hoss" and grew well because of their genetic package, not necessarily because of mom's milking ability? Did you take a 60-day weight, or a 120-day weight? If you did, you can track individual performance to see if mom was just THAT good, or if the performance of that individual can be attributed more to that one being a genetic star. How about you keep that one for a potential breeder?

Hopefully that convinces you that having some performance data at your fingertips is helpful. Especially since goats have NO performance data to pull from nationally, and the sheep industry is still taking baby steps. So what would be the performance measures to keep as minimums? I suggest the following for ewes and does: Age of female, Buck or Ram bred to, offspring's date of birth, number born live, number born dead, number weaned. For the kid flock: single/twin/triple, gender, birth weight, 60-day weight, 120-day weight, sale weight, value of individual at sale time. Now, please also consider keeping those records in a format you can review with a critical eye like Excel spreadsheets or Access databases. There are also several apps and software packages specifically for flock/herd management you can download or buy.

Once you have decided to take that plunge to keep consistent records in a reviewable format, THIS time of year you should be making decisions based on the normal visual appraisal and solid, scientific records. These concepts apply to any livestock, so don't think that if you are raising woodlot pigs you shouldn't keep records. *Oh no!* Still please give that part of the job the effort. It could be the difference between profit and loss in a given year.

Sources: Greiner, S., Understanding Sheep Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs). Virginia Cooperative Extension.



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Upcoming Events

October 19 (times TBA)

[Silvapasture Workshop](#)

Starting at Robert Bradford's Farm in Barboursville & ending at Blue Ridge Cafe in Ruckersville

more information and registration coming soon, contact Sarah Sharpe, (434)985-5236 or seweaver@vt.edu for more information



October 27 and November 3, 6 pm - 8 pm

[Introduction to Whole Farm Planning](#)

Greene County Extension Office, \$30 registration fee, contact Sarah Sharpe, (434)985-5236 or seweaver@vt.edu for more information



November 9 and 17, 6 pm - 8 pm

[Introduction to Whole Farm Planning](#)

Louisa County Extension Office, \$30 registration fee, contact Sarah Sharpe, (434)985-5236 or seweaver@vt.edu for more information



November 10

[Market Ready Farm to Restaurant Workshop](#)

at the Gathering Place in Harrisonburg, VA, contact French Price, (540)435-6029 for more information



November 14, 16, and 18, 4 pm—6 pm

[Introduction to Beekeeping](#)

Greene County Extension Office, \$30 per person, a drawing will be held for a beginning beekeeper kit during the series, pre-register at <http://tinyurl.com/beekeeping2016>, contact Sarah Sharpe, (434)985-5236 or seweaver@vt.edu for more information



November 15, 22, and 29, 6 pm - 8:30 pm

[Beef Cattle Series](#)

Blue Ridge Cafe, Ruckersville, VA, contact Sarah Sharpe, (434)985-5236 or seweaver@vt.edu for more information



November 17

[Market Ready Farm to Restaurant Workshop](#)

at Mid Atlantic Farm Credit in Winchester, VA, contact French Price, (540)435-6029 for more information



January 22-25, 2017

[Twilight AFGC National Conference](#)

Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center, Roanoke, VA

http://afgc.associationonline.com/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=543&pk_association_webpage=699



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