

## **It's Not Too Late to Plan for Summer Grazing**

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Even though we can't predict what type of summer we will have, it's not a stretch to say it will be hot and we will have a drought. Maybe it will be a small drought, or maybe it will be extreme. But it will be dry. Drought means less production from tall fescue pastures and hayfields. It's not too late to plan for this. If you don't have some type of summer perennial grass planted (bermudagrass, native grasses, etc.) then you can go ahead and plant a summer annual like sudex or crabgrass. These grasses are more adapted to the hot, dry conditions of summer.

### **Potential uses for summer annual forages**

*A. Creep graze pasture for calves* - putting up a creep gate and allowing calves access to a limited acreage is a good alternative to creep feeding with grain. The high quality of the available forage can add extra weight on the calves.

*B. Supplemental pasture for beef cows* - a high quality forage can help the cows rebreed faster, milk better. Summer annual grasses can provide forage production when poor pasture growth might otherwise require hay feeding.

*C. Hay production* - if your hay supplies have not been restored, these grasses can help restock the hay barn.

### **Steps for establishing summer annuals**

**(1) Planting method** – These forages can be planted both conventionally and no-till. Conventional tillage ensures the reduction of competition from existing vegetation. For successful no-till planting, this vegetation must be killed chemically with a burn-down herbicide. Seed should be planted ½ to 1½ inches deep.

**(2) Planting dates** - Summer annuals can be planted from late spring through mid-summer. Sorghum X sudangrass hybrids are more tolerant of low temperatures than pearl millet and can be planted earlier in the year, when there is still a chance of a late spring frost. The recommended seeding date for sorghum X sudangrass hybrids are from April 20 to July 1. Pearl millet, crabgrass and forage soybean should be planted from May 1 to July 1.

**(3) Seeding rates** - Pearl millet should be planted at the rate of 10-15 lb/acre if drilled, or 20 lb/acre if broadcast. Sorghum X sudangrass hybrids should be planted at 30 lb/acre if drilled, or 45 lb/acre if broadcast. Crabgrass should be planted at 3-4 lb pure live seed/acre, and soybean at 2 bu/acre

**(4) Fertilization** - Summer annuals should be fertilized with potash and phosphate and limed according to soil test. Often times these crops may follow a small grain crop which has been well fertilized. There is no way to know if the crop will be under- or overfertilized without a soil test. For the grasses, apply 30 to 60 lb N/acre at establishment. If moisture is adequate, 30 lb of N/acre can be applied to the grasses in mid-July.

### **Toxicities**

Often times people hesitate to use these grasses because of the toxicities that can occur from them. There are two toxicities that can develop in these grasses. The first is nitrate

poisoning, which occurs in sorghum x sudangrass hybrids, crabgrass and pearl millet. Nitrates can accumulate to toxic levels during a drought. Avoid grazing or cutting hay from these grasses during periods of water stress. If you suspect high nitrate levels, contact your local Extension office to have the forage tested.

The second toxicity that can occur is prussic acid poisoning. This occurs in sorghum x sudangrass hybrids, but not in pearl millet or crabgrass. Prussic acid will be found after a frost. Be careful when grazing this grass in the fall because of the potential of frost. Prussic acid degrades during drying, so there is no prussic acid toxicity in hay.

Summer forages are useful in a forage system because they produce of quality forage during the summer. These forages can be used across the state to provide nutrients either as grazing or as hay. Following the guidelines listed above will help you have success with summer annuals.