

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

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## Farm Update

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES  
EDUCATION

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### **Summer Annual Grasses are a Tool for Pasture Renovation**

Pasture and hay forage should be considered cash crops. Their yield translates to pounds of animal gain and subsequent return to a livestock enterprise. Land is valuable, therefore obtaining the greatest return on investment comes by selling as many pounds of animal from your farm as possible annually. I often write articles pertaining to pasture weed control and fertility as a means of increasing animal production and stocking rates. Now is the time to consider fields that need complete renovation, and summer annual grasses are a tool to accomplish this task successfully.

There are several factors to consider when determining the need to kill out an existing stand of forage, whether it is grass or a mixture of grass, weeds, and clover. The primary reason is the simple decline of desirable plants overall. This occurs over time, most often as a result of overgrazing, or cutting hay too close to the soil. These slow plant regrowth and kill grasses over time. During this, weeds and undesirable clovers proliferate, leading to a further decline in forage quality. In addition, endophyte infected tall fescue may be the only perennial grass in the mix, further hindering animal performance on a pasture overrun with weeds. If you have a field that fits this description, killing it off and seeding a warm-season grass this month will provide

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an excellent forage for hay or grazing. This practice is also the initial step in preparing the field to establish permanent cool-season grass this fall.

The two most popular warm-season grasses are sorghum/sudangrass hybrid and pearl millet. Both are thick-stemmed grass plants. The most inexpensive and easiest method to harvest these crops is by grazing. Haying is possible, but curing can be difficult to accomplish without using a mower conditioner and hay tedder. Both plant types are susceptible to nitrate toxicity if severe drought conditions occur after nitrogen application. Sorghum/sudan is subject to prussic acid, but pearl millet is not. Both types of grass can be planted through July, allowing one hay harvest or heavy grazing from the field determined for renovation this fall. Two grazings can be expected with pearl millet, which regrows rapidly if a five-inch stubble height is left. Ideally, harvest should occur after the grasses reach 18 inches in height but before seed head development. The second harvest would occur in 4 to 6 weeks.

Summer annuals have a high nutrient requirement, so lime, P, and K should be applied according to the soil test, and 60 to 100 pounds of nitrogen is needed at seeding, followed by an additional 50 pounds after each harvest. Sorghum/Sudan should be seeded at 20 to 40 pounds per acre,  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 inches deep, if necessary to get moisture. Pearl millet should be seeded at 10 to 20 pounds per acre,  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches deep.

If seeding the field this fall with a perennial cool-season grass such as a novel-endophyte fescue, time should be taken when planting the warm-season grass to get the field smoothed up and ready for no-till planting. Ideally, the warm-season grasses would also be no-tilled, but this is the opportunity after spraying with glyphosate to kill the existing stand and use some tillage to

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smooth eroded areas. Thus, improving stand establishment and leaving the field prepared for seeding this fall.

An alternative to warm-season annuals as a pasture renovation technique is following all the above recommended practices, but planting a late group two or early three maturity soybean. We are past the window for optimum soybean yield with group two soybeans, but they are a crop to consider if planting and harvest equipment or services are available. Soybeans in that maturity group will harvest in early September, providing an ideal no-till seedbed for grass establishment, and some cash income to pay for more expensive novel-endophyte fescue. The Apollo FFA chapter has a 10-foot-wide no-till drill available to rent for seeding the summer crop and grass seed this fall. For more information, give me a call at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension office, 270-685-8480.

## **Independence Day**

The Daviess County Cooperative Extension Office will be closed next Friday in observance of Independence Day.

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