

The Wet Weather Over the Past Month or so has been both Bad and Good for Forage Crops

By Robert Kallenbach

The wet weather over the past month or so has been both bad and good for forage crops. First, the bad news. Growth rates on established cool-season grasses have been slower than usual. Most years, growth rates of 60 lb/acre/day are possible in the first few weeks of October. This year growth rates were a little more than half that. This was due to at least three factors: 1) limited sunshine 2) water logged plants, and 3) low soil nitrogen availability. The last factor might surprise some, but given that we had wet conditions most all year long and generally good forage growth statewide, much of the N was used by plants earlier in the season unless N fertilizer applications were made in late summer or early autumn.

That said, tall fescue pastures can still make some significant growth in the next month. While growth rates in November are typically in the 10 to 25 lb/acre/day range in Missouri, this could still supply a good bit of forage for grazing on most farms. The key here will be utilizing this forage efficiently. Use of rotational stocking or the likes could nearly double animal utilization.

Now a little more bad news. I have seen serious soil erosion on some newly planted forage fields, where conventional tillage was used. While perennial forage crop fields typically have some of the lowest soil erosion rates, they are quite vulnerable to soil erosion just after planting when conventional tillage is used. While “what’s done is done”, I must

say that use of no-till establishment of forage crops is often cheaper, faster, and reduces the potential for soil erosion.

Now a little good news. This past autumn was good in terms of establishing a new forage field, if soil erosion was kept in check. The moist conditions have allowed for excellent germination in most cases and since young seedlings are susceptible to even short periods of drought following germination, the wet weather has allowed for near perfect establishment in many cases.

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