



University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service

Extension Notes

carter.ca.uky.edu

AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Rebecca Konopka
Carter County Extension Office

Using summer annuals to reclaim hay feeding areas

Wet conditions this winter resulted in almost complete disturbance in and around hay feeding areas. Even well-designed feeding pads could have significant damage where animals enter and leave. These highly disturbed areas create perfect growing conditions for summer annual weeds like spiny pigweed and cockle bur. While these areas may look rough now, you can improve them.

Regardless of the reclamation strategy you use, it is always important to create an environment that allows seeds to germinate quickly and uniformly and rapidly achieve canopy closure. The best defense against summer annual weeds is covering the soil with a desirable forage.

Damaged areas should be soil tested, and lime and fertilizer applied as needed. In most cases, fertility will be high in hay feeding areas due to high concentrations of animal wastes and rotting organic material. However, a quick soil test will allow you to confirm this and tell you if you need to add lime.

Be aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how UK accepts soil testing samples. For now, UK soil testing labs in Princeton and Lexington are open, but you should contact your local extension office on current protocols for submitting samples. Currently, the Carter County Extension Office is accepting soil samples via a drop box by the front door.

In most cases, feeding areas need complete renovation each spring. You will need to harrow these areas to smooth and level them. The goal is to produce a fine, but firm seedbed that will enhance soil-to-seed contact. Good soil contact is essential for rapid germination and uniform emergence of the forage crop.

Summer annual grasses planted in the late spring or early summer have the highest probability of successful establishment. Summer annuals adapted to Kentucky include sorghum-sudangrass, sudangrass, pearl millet and crabgrass. These grasses, especially sorghum-sudangrass and sudangrass, have very rapid emergence and canopy closure. Not only do these grasses prevent the germination of summer annual weeds, they give you another summer grazing option. This is particularly important, as many of our cool-season pastures struggle during the hot, dry summer weather.

To help your summer annual grasses get established, make sure you use the high end of the recommended seeding rate. Even with summer annuals, rapid canopy closure is critical for reducing summer annual weeds. For summer annual grasses to germinate and rapidly emerge, plant them when soil

temperatures reach at least 60 degrees F. If you have a planting delay after final tillage, it may be a good idea to do one more pass of light tillage to disturb any weed seedling that may have germinated.

Allow taller growing summer annuals like sorghum-sudangrass and pearl millet to reach a height of 18-24 inches before grazing, and remove animals from the field once livestock graze it to 8-10 inches. Crabgrass can be grazed once it reaches a height of 6 to 8 inches. Cattle should be pulled off the field once it has been grazed to a height of 3 to 4 inches. If you plan to cut summer annuals for hay, allow the taller species to reach 30 to 40 inches before mowing. Crabgrass should be cut for hay at the late boot-stage. Be careful not to mow crabgrass closer than 3 to 4 inches.

For more information on pasture renovations, visit the UK Forage Extension website at <http://forages.ca.uky.edu/> or contact the Carter County office of the UK Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.