Spring is an important time of year for pasture care. Here is a list of things you can do in the next couple months to get your pastures looking great.

**Plant Seed** The best time of year to seed/overseed a pasture is fall for cool-season forages. However, spring is an acceptable time of year if you missed the fall deadline. If you seed in the spring, be prepared to let the pasture rest for about a year. The newly planted forage needs to be able to develop strong roots in order to withstand grazing. It is also the most appetizing grass and will have a hard time developing under grazing pressure. Planting Guide for NC: [http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/A-Planting-Guide-for-Forage-Crops-in-NC.pdf](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/A-Planting-Guide-for-Forage-Crops-in-NC.pdf)

**Plan Summer Pastures** Now is the time to think about your warm-season perennials or annuals for summer grazing. Refer to the planting guide for the best dates for planting those summer pastures.

**Take Soil Samples** See if your pastures need any nutrients and/or lime. Once the frost is out and the soils have dried, samples can be taken. Contact your county Extension office for more information and to obtain soil sampling forms and boxes. *There is a $4 fee/sample in place until April 1st.*

**Fertilize** As stated above, test your soils first, so you know how much you need. Often, only nitrogen is needed in pastures. Don’t guess, soil test!

**Spray Herbicides** Spring is a good time to spray annual weeds as it prevents them from getting established. However, mowing is usually sufficient for annual weed control unless weed densities are high. *Always read the label before spraying for sensitive crops that may be nearby, and withdrawal times.*

**Check fences** Snow/ice and deer can be hard on fences. Check them before you turn out any livestock.

**Plan your grazing system** Think back to last year whether you had enough grass or if the pasture turned into a putting green or mud pit. You may need to supplement your livestock with hay during certain times of the grazing season and set aside a sacrifice area when the pasture needs a rest.

**Let the grass grow** Start rotationally grazing once grass starts growing. Don’t let livestock chase green grass over the entire farm since that will delay significant growth and sustained grazing even longer.

**Repair Equipment** Start repairing haying equipment for spring harvest.
I was just in Southern States this past weekend and grass tetany is already rearing its ugly head for some producers. Here are the facts so you can be prepared as we go into spring:

**What is grass tetany and when does it occur?**
Grass tetany is a nutritional or metabolic condition in beef cattle and sheep triggered by low amounts of magnesium (Mg) in the blood serum. This disorder occurs most frequently in the spring when livestock graze young, succulent, cool season grasses. It intensifies in warm periods, five to 10 days after a cool, wet period when grass is growing rapidly. Although it is less prominent, grass tetany can also occur in the fall when regrowth of cool season grasses occurs.

**What causes grass tetany?**
Factors that can increase the occurrence of grass tetany in livestock include stress, drought, diets low in Mg and phosphorous (P), diets with nutrient imbalances that interfere with Mg metabolism, high levels of nitrogen (N) or potassium (K) in feed or soils, increased Mg demand during lactation, minimal availability of standing dead forage, and forages with a “tetany ratio” \( \frac{K}{(\text{Calcium} + \text{Mg})} \) of greater than 2:2. Because it is a function of soils, plant species, harvested feed, environmental factors and animals, the severity of this disorder varies between states, counties, ranches and pastures.

**What are the symptoms?**
Early symptoms of grass tetany include uncoordinated gait, staggering, nervousness, excitability and muscle spasms. In many cases, animal mortality is the first sign of grass tetany identified, due to a short, four- to eight-hour time interval between the onset of early symptoms and death.

**Which animals may it affect?**
Female animals have been shown to be more prone to grass tetany than males. Older animals, animals that have recently given birth, those nursing young less than eight weeks of age, high milk producers and fat animals are also more susceptible to grass tetany than other classes of animals. However, it has also been seen in young or dry cows and in growing calves in extreme conditions. Older animals have a diminished ability to absorb Mg, Mg requirements increase greatly directly post-partum and during heavy lactation periods, and fat cows have less Mg available for absorption in their body fluids than lean cows.

**Grass Tetany in NC**
Several recent surveys have shown that the major minerals most likely to be deficient in the eastern US are salt and magnesium. The three trace minerals most likely to be deficient across the entire country are zinc, copper, and selenium. When cows are deficient in trace minerals they appear unthrifty and in poor body condition, and when they are deficient in magnesium they can die suddenly for no obvious reason.

Many cows sent to the diagnostic lab in North Carolina for necropsy are diagnosed with magnesium tetany (also called grass or winter tetany), and also often have very low selenium and copper status. In other areas of the country different minerals such as phosphorus may be deficient, so local recommendations should be used in developing mineral supplementation programs.

Traditionally, cattle producers have used trace mineralized salt blocks (“red salt”), sulfurized salt (“yellow salt”) or just plain white salt as their mineral program. The problem with these supplements is that the only mineral they provide in any significant amount is salt. For example, common “red salt” contains salt and some trace minerals, but does not provide magnesium or selenium, nor adequate levels of either zinc or copper. Because of a general risk of grass tetany on high fertility pastures in the eastern US, a “high mag” complete mineral (8 to 12% magnesium) might be used at all times unless in an area where grass tetany is rare.

When tetany is rare, we still recommend that producers use a “high mag” product from 30 days before the cows calve until the end of the lush growth period in late spring. For simplicity, most producers with small herds choose to use “high mag” mineral all year. There are many “high mag” product choices on the market. Producers should buy a product that is labeled for consumption at 4 oz/day per cow. It should have 8% or higher magnesium, at least 0.09% copper (900 ppm, from copper sulfate or chloride), at least 0.18% zinc (1800 ppm), and at least 0.0026% selenium (26 ppm).

The mineral supplement should be available at all times in a covered feeder, should be kept fresh and dry, and intake should be monitored to make sure cows consume close to the recommended amount. Cows used to salt may consume a large amount of the complete mineral supplement at first but should slow intake to near target levels after several weeks. If cows don’t eat enough mineral, mixing in dry molasses or grain can encourage initial consumption. If problems with over- or under-consumption continue, check with the manufacturer for advice, or switch products.
North Carolina Cooperative Extension

Soil & Water Conservation District News

Applications are being accepted for the North Carolina Cost Share Program for better management practices such as fencing out streams and ponds, installing wells and livestock waterers. Contact your county Soil & Water Conservation District office for more information:

Alamance County: 336-228-1753 ext. 3
Orange County: 919-245-2750

Forage Management Tips

From Production and Utilization of Pastures and Forages in North Carolina.

April

- Fertilize cool-season grasses if you have not already done so.
- Watch for symptoms of grass tetany.
- Spray for alfalfa weevil according to recommendations.
- Winter annual pastures should be completely used before grazing begins on other pastures which may be harvested for hay.
- Harvest fescue and orchardgrass pastures or hay fields as soon as the seed heads begin to flower.
- Harvest alfalfa (second year stands or older) in the bud stage (before flowering begins).
- To maintain clover in grass pastures and maintain quality, develop a rotational grazing system in which cattle can graze forage to a 2-inch height before moving them to another pasture.
- Fertilize warm-season grasses (Bermuda, bahia, dallis, switchgrass, flaccidgrass) as soon as dormancy breaks.
- Get all hybrid bermudagrass established this month unless irrigation is available. Seed bahia grass or switchgrass during mid-April or May in the piedmont.

May

- Plant warm-season perennial grasses such as switchgrass, flaccidgrass, common bermudagrass, gamagrass, and bluestem.
- Plant summer annuals at two-week intervals to stagger the forage availability.
- Fertilize warm-season grasses with nitrogen after each cutting or every four to six weeks on pastures.
- If irrigation is available, hybrid bermudagrass sprigs may be planted, but weed control will be essential.
- Spray pasture weeds while they are small (3 inches) for most effective control.
- Do not apply nitrogen to fescue or orchardgrass pastures after April until August.

June

- Take soil samples from fields which will be overseeded or planted during the autumn. Apply limestone as far in advance of planting as possible.
- A late planting of summer annuals may be made to extend forage supply.
- To stimulate warm-season grass yields, apply nitrogen after each cutting or every four to six weeks.
- Graze bermudagrass close (1 to 2-inch stubble), and, every four to six weeks, harvest any growth that has not been grazed. Cross fencing is a practical tool to help manage feed quality.
- Control summer pasture weeds before they get too tall and mature.
A comprehensive parasite control program involves more than deworming your horse on a regular basis. The most important feature is the ability to reduce the number of parasites and eggs in the environment. Secondly, the program should be effective with the fewest number of treatments necessary. Finally, the program should be broad spectrum to control many different types of parasites.

Preventative medication is a very important component of parasite control. The bad news is that there is no single program that works for all situations. However, there are many different programs available, these include:

**Targeted Dosing:** This strategy involves testing the level of parasite burdens in individual animals. Standard fecal egg counts should be performed once monthly. Also tapeworm testing via fecal testing or serology (blood testing) should be done twice yearly. All animals that are positive over a certain cut off level should be treated. A yearly treatment for “bots” should also be included during the winter. This program is only appropriate for adult horses and should be considered on a farm with a dedicated manager where good grazing management is in place.

**Strategic Dosing:** This strategy involves treating all pastured animals at regular intervals with an appropriate product. The interval between dosing can be determined by the egg reappearance period (ERP) of the medication, which is shorter for young animals. The ERP is the period after medicating an animal with a dewormer until there are significant numbers of parasite eggs present again in the feces. The animals are only treated during the spring/summer season when the risk for increased egg loads is highest.

**Interval Dosing:** This strategy is the one most commonly used. It is similar to Strategic Dosing; however, animals are treated year round at regular intervals. As the duration of parasite kill varies from product to product and even between farms, the interval between doses should be determined by the ERP or by guidelines set by your veterinarian based upon products used. This program may be appropriate for farms where there are frequent new additions to the group, at more casually managed (hobby) farms and in young animals.

**Daily Deworming:** This strategy involves the addition of a parasite control medication to the horse's daily ration. This program is appropriate for most adult grazing horses; however, additional periodic deworming with other products is usually necessary. Twice yearly treatment with ivermectin (Eqvalan, Phoenectrin, Zimectrin), ivermectin/praziquantel (Equell) or moxidectin (Quest) has been recommended. This program can select somewhat for resistant organisms since the parasites are continuously exposed to a low level of the drug.

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**Enroll Your Land Today!**

The purpose of the Agricultural District Program is to encourage the preservation and protection of farmland from non-farm development. This is in recognition of the importance of agriculture to the economic and social well being of North Carolina. Participation is strictly voluntary! There are many benefits for the farmers who enroll such as (but not limited to) public recognition, increased protection from nuisance suits, and an official role in county or city government. For more information contact your county VAD program coordinator today!


**Orange VAD Form:** [http://www.co.orange.nc.us/deapr/documents/VAD%20application.pdf](http://www.co.orange.nc.us/deapr/documents/VAD%20application.pdf)

Best Breeds To Raise: Meat-type crosses (Rock-Cornish) or commercial hybrid broilers are the most efficient birds available. Purebred poultry most commonly raised for meat are Cornish, Plymouth Rocks and White Jersey Giants. Purebreds are less efficient and take up to 14 weeks to develop a desirable carcass. When considering birds for meat production, select birds with light colored plumage. Dark feathered birds are less desirable because of their dark pin feathers left after slaughtering.

Floor Space: At least 1.5 square feet per bird, however, 2 square feet recommended.

Litter: Wet and compacted litter is of special concern with meat-type birds. These conditions cause breast sores and leg weaknesses and give the carcasses an undesirable appearance. Never brood chicks on slippery surfaces. Meat birds need traction and leg support. Pine shavings or straw work best.

Feed: Feed a completely balanced ration. For fryers and broilers, feed a starter mash or crumble pellets containing 20-23% protein until slaughtered. For roasters, feed a 20% protein starter for the first 6 weeks then switch to a 18% protein grower feed. Many people just "dilute" the starter by feeding 90% starter mash with 10% corn from 6 to 10 weeks and feeding 80% starter mash and 20% corn after 10 weeks of age.

Feeder: Three (3) inches of feeder space per bird. The lip of the feeder should be level with the birds back height to prevent feed wastage. Only fill trough feeder 1/3 or 1/2 full to prevent wastage. Keep feed in front of birds at all times.

Waterer: At least 6 gallons of water per 100 birds daily. Clean the waterers and provide fresh water daily. Place the waterers so that the lip is level with the birds back. One inch (1") of water space/bird.

Lights: Constant light is recommended. Provide one 25-40 watt bulb per 100 sq. feet.

Roosts: Do not use roosts for meat-type chickens. Roosts cause breast blisters, crooked keels, bruises and lameness in heavy meat birds.

Yards: Not necessary, but if desired, confine the birds to an exercise area which provides between 5 and 10 sq. feet per bird.

When To Slaughter: Two (2) to three (3) lb. fryers should be slaughtered at 4 to 5 weeks of age, 4 to 5 lb. broilers slaughtered at 6 to 9 weeks of age and roasters at 9 to 14 weeks of age. Remember, as the birds get older and larger they become less efficient and they eat a larger amount of feed for each pound of weight gained. Older birds produce more fat, so slaughter the birds as close to the desired weight as possible.
UPCOMING EVENTS

“Homegrown” In the Park
April 5, 2014–10:00am-4:00pm
Burlington City Park, FREE Food & Door Prizes
Sponsored by: Alamance County Farm Bureau

ACCA Field Day
April 8, 2014–1:00pm–Until
Iseley Farms, 2960 Burch Bridge Rd. Burlington
Educational Activities, Vendor Displays, Reverse Tractor Raffle, and more!
FMI: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Alamance-County-Cattlemens-Association/264094913753000?ref=hl

Central Piedmont Jr. Livestock Show & Sale
April 9-10, 2014
Orange Grove Rd.
Hillsborough, NC

Piedmont Regional Goat & Sheep Producer Training
May 5, 2014–9:00am-4:00pm
Guilford County Extension Barn, Greensboro, NC
*Pre-Registration is Required!*  

Area Pastured Poultry Workshop
May 13, 2014–5:30pm-7:30pm
Wings of Dawn Farm, Liberty, NC
*Pre-Registration is Required!*  

Native Grasses in Forage Systems
June 10, 2014–8:30am-3:30pm
Cedar Grove Ruritan Club & Hollowell Farms
Orange County, Details: TBA

Cattlemen’s Association Meetings

Alamance County (ACCA)
Regular meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of the month from September-March, Field Day in April:
♦ April 8 – Field Day
♦ September 9
♦ October 14
♦ November 11
♦ December 9
Meetings begin at 6:30pm at Occasions in Burlington, unless otherwise announced.

Orange-Durham Counties (ODCA)
Regular meetings on the 1st Monday in February, October, & December and 1st Tuesday in April – Summer cattle clinic TBA:
♦ April 1 – Internal & External Parasites
♦ Summer Cattle Clinic – TBA
♦ October 6
♦ December 1
Meetings begin at 6:30pm at Schley Grange in Hillsborough.

For more information regarding upcoming events and/or cattlemen’s association meetings, Please contact:
Lauren Langley at lauren_langley@ncsu.edu or 336-266-0702.

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