



Field Notes for The Week Of

3-6-2023

Time To Evaluate Your Forage Stands

I don't care if it is still officially winter according to the weather and climate specialist, I believe spring has sprung. Spring is my favorite season; I truly enjoy watching life begin a new cycle. Spring officially begins on March 20th but occasionally, mother nature likes to get a head start, and this year is the case. The grass is greening up, Easter lilies are in full bloom, silver maple buds are dropping, and the song of the robin is in the air! As things come to life, farm work gets ripping and raring as well. Last week was a slower week for many producers due to the on-and-off rain showers, but the warmer-than-average temperature did make it pleasant to do the chores. Friday brought severe weather to the region and unfortunately with all the good things spring weather brings there is just as much bad. Flooding rains and strait line winds caused major damage and power outages to the area Friday, March 3rd. Many trees and structures were damaged, and even your ag educator was not immune to the storm's wrath as my family lost one of our machinery sheds to the storm's brutal blow! As the weather transitions from winter to spring, destructive weather can wreak havoc on the landscape. Enough with the bad, back with the good, I managed to make a few field visits this past week from looking at feeder calves, checking new hay seedings, and even planting Geraniums at the venture production greenhouse, this was truly a productive week. Speaking of forages and planting I thought I would touch on evaluating forage stands. This time of year is a great time to start walking new forage seeding to make critical management decisions such as fertilizer application, harvest equipment adjustments, and possible overseeding to thicken up the stand. Here are a few steps that can help make those decisions.

- If you have alfalfa look for frost-heaving damage, this is when the crown is heaved out of the ground due to freezing and thawing of the soil. Adjust your cutter bare on the mower to 4 inches if frost heaving has occurred to prevent cutting the crown.
- Check stand thickness, take a 1 ft by 1 ft square area, and estimate how much bare soil is present. It is best to see less than 20% bare ground in your new seeding, bare ground = weeds.
- Soil test- if you have not tested your soil for 3 years or more, consider taking a soil test as you scout your fields. If you need assistance calculating what fertilizer to use based on your soil test gives me a call!
- Finally, do not rush the nitrogen- just because the grass is yellow does not mean nitrogen is the issue, it could be other deficiencies such as potassium. Taking a soil test will assist. Nitrogen rates are best applied a little at a time. 30 lbs. of actual nitrogen is enough to stimulate grass growth before first cutting. Overdoing the nitrogen can cause plants to mature faster and lodge, making mowing very fun!!!

