



Field Notes for The Week Of

3-21-22

The Grass Is Coming to Life!

The first official week of spring is upon us, and it looks like spring weather is in the forecast. The landscape and nature are starting to wake up from its winter slumber. This past week was a fantastic weather week with drier and warm conditions, allowing producers to get started with spring chores. This past week I was able to get out and do multiple field visits across the county and I saw a lot of busy farmers working the land. Some field work I witnessed was manure applications, calving, fence building, alfalfa seeding, and even fertilizing! This week on my own farm I took advantage of the great weather to top dress some winter wheat and evaluate some frost seeded clover stands. I am very pleased with the growth of the clover so far and excited to see the grass come to life and beginning to grow. So as the grass begins to grow what are some critical steps we can take to make sure we can get the full potential, no matter if we are making hay or grazing. Here are some early spring considerations for pastures and hay fields.

1. **Don't test the grass too early**- Unless you are like me, and love mornings don't be too rough on the grass too early in the season. Forages are just waking up from a long hard winter, so turning livestock out to graze too early can be detrimental on overall plant health.
2. **Time for breakfast**- As forages break winter dormancy, many of the nutrient reserves are depleted. Cool season forages such as orchard grass, timothy and fescue can benefit greatly to nutrient application no matter if this manure or commercial fertilizer. Before purchasing any fertilizer, I would recommend collecting a soil sample to see what nutrients are already available to the plant and how much need to be compensated for. If you plan on applying nitrogen fertilizer, make sure the forage is actively growing. Applying fertilizer or manure to dormant plants can lead to nutrient loss and unproductive forage uptake.
3. **Split up the application**- Avoid applying all your fertilizer on growing forage crops in one part of the growing season. Apply half in the spring and the other half in late summer can prevent waste and pollution of water sources.
4. **Nitrogen matures**- Nitrogen fertilizer stimulates plant cell division and triggers plants to produce seed. Next time you complain about grass forages going to seed too fast remember all that nitrogen fertilizer you applied!
5. **You can't starve a profit**- Fertilizer prices are high, but hay prices are high too!

