

# Weekly Article

2-6-2023

## Do you Have a Clover Dilemma?

Hello, my name is Richard Purdin with OSU Extension, Ag and Natural Resource Educator, and Community Development Educator for Adams County. I hope to better inform local producers and the public of the latest news in the world of agriculture. Lately, I have been waking up with a stiff neck, I am not sure the true reason why? It could be due to sleeping in the wrong position or trying to carry too much feed and water to livestock, I myself think it is due to a bad case of weather whiplash!!! From cold to warm, snow to rain, Old man winter is just like a very poor driver rear-ending or t-boning us every chance he gets! Last week our furry rodent friends predicted 6 more weeks of winter, and both buckeye chuck and Punxsutawney Phil did not want to leave their burrows. Phil and Chuck's prediction might have some validity with cool and wet conditions persisting into early March and ending with slightly higher-than-normal temperatures but above-normal precipitation. The farmer was given a few opportunities to get some field work done last week as cold temperatures allowed the soil to freeze up. Farmers were able to move hay, clean up and apply some manure, and continue to deliver grain to local grain elevators. As the day begins to get longer, signs of spring are beginning to come alive. Some signs of spring include the cardinal cheer song for springs, ducks beginning to visit your farm ponds, the silver maples will begin to bud, and the sap beginning to flow, as the earth warms, waters will begin to warm bringing spring peepers back to life. These are all signs I like to look and listen for as I conduct my daily farm chores. Once I am done with the chores I like to take a walk in my pastures and hay fields and evaluate stand strength and % clover or other legumes.

It has been well known that adding legumes to a grass-based pasture or hay field can help reduce fertility costs due to the legumes' ability to fix their own Nitrogen and then slowly release nitrogen to neighboring grass plants. With high fertilizer prices, this is important. But there is so much more to the story! Legumes provide many benefits to forage stands, soil health, and livestock health. It is recommended that legumes like clover should make up at least 25-30% of your pasture or mixed forage stands. When legume percentages rise above 40% risk of bloat in grazing livestock increases and completion or crowding out grass species also becomes a risk. In my short career as an agricultural technical service provider, I have concluded that most producers (I myself) are easily deceived about just how much clover they actually have in their forage stands. Estimating legumes can be challenging and take years of practice but there are some procedures such as measuring a 12"x12" block and clipping to a 2-inch height and then separating out the clover from the grass, drying the sample and then weight the sample

of each grass and legume to receive the total %. This is by far one of the more accurate methods of evaluating clover stands but if you are like me time is limited so I have adopted the walk estimating and this can be easily done while you are checking the cows. All you will need is a writing utensil, paper, and a clipboard.

Step #1 Start walking the pasture or hay field (this does not include an ATV) in a zig-zag motion starting in a corner of the pasture.

Step #2 walk 5-10 steps and look down at the tip of your shoe.

Step #3 record what type of vegetation you see at the tip of your shoe and then record on your paper as grass, legume, weed, or bare ground.

Step #4 repeat this about 50 times and add up the number of each vegetation type recorded. For example, let us say out of the total 50 stops your shoe landed on white clover 20 times, take the number 20, and multiply it by 2 = % clover species –  $20 \times 2 = 40\%$  white clover.

This is a good simple method that can also give you a good idea if you have a weed issue or poor forage stands. I like to walk pasture throughout the growing season to adjust grazing strategies and implement management practices such as forage stand renovations, fertilizing, or overseeding decisions. There are multiple benefits to adding legumes to your grass forage stands. Mid-February through early March is a great time to frost seed clovers and other legumes in your hay fields or pastures. If you need information on legume species, seeding rates, or seeding strategies reach out to me at [Purdin.19@osu.edu](mailto:Purdin.19@osu.edu) or call (937) 544-2339.

#### Other information:

- 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Farm Machinery Show February 15-18<sup>th</sup> at the Kentucky Exposition Center, 937 Phillips Lane, Louisville, KY 40209 go to <https://farmmachineryshow.org/event-info/> to learn more.
- March 10<sup>th</sup>, 6:30-9:00 pm, Bull Buying School located at Rains Farm and Greenhouse 2667 Nichols Ridge Road Seaman Ohio 45679.
- Deadline to make Agriculture risk coverage (ARC/PLC) elections is March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Call the local USDA, FSA office at (937)544-2033 to learn more.

**Ag Educator Words of encouragement** – “To forget how to dig the earth and to tend the soil is to forget ourselves” **Mahatma Gandhi**