What I Know about Forage Economics?

By: Gordon Groover

A key assumption behind this article is that the farm business in managed to make a profit. A second assumption is that the environment farm business managers face is not constant, or to quote Heraclitus, (535 BCE), "The only constant is change." That is, as prices and exchange rates change then management strategies, enterprises, and capital investments must change for the farm to remain profitable. This includes transitioning from high dependency on coastal corn silage to their beef herd as opposed to what was a common practice 40-50 years ago. Corn silage was and is still a high quality feed for ruminants, yet the capital investment required to plant, harvest, transport, store, and feed has increased the total costs of corn silage. On a relative costs basis and with the help of round bale technology the cost of making hay was less than corn silage, leading to wholesale adoption for winter feeding of hay for beef cattle. The round baler reduced labor costs, allowing 1-2 people to harvest and transport hay as opposed to hiring the high school football team to pick up bales and stack them in the barn. This round baler is a major part of this step is to have enough antibiotics and medicine on hand, in the event of concentrate feed will likely have greater challenges.

Hemp, Hemp Hooray?

By: John Fike

Many of you will know Dr. Ben Tracy, Virginia Tech's grassland ecologist, and will have experienced his dry and dry sense of humor. Salutations go to Ben for this article's title, which was the subject line in an email he sent me last year on news that the Virginia legislature had approved the research of hemp in the state. The "H" has certainly seemed warranted, but the continued loosening of hemp laws in states across the country, and growing positive perception of hemp products is giving hemp is likely to gain easier – at least legally, and "T" may yield to "T." Over time I'll give occasional updates on Virginia's efforts with hemp and where the law stands.

When should this be done? At 60 days before weaning.

When should this be done? At weaning.

When should this be done? Prior to weaning calves.

You may actual increase your total costs and reduce your ability to remain profitable. Thus consider the necessity to calculate your total costs and compare alternatives such as reducing your equipment investment and purchasing hay, otherwise you may have the worst of both worlds, well, in terms of costs. Relying on purchased hay also requires that you develop a long-term strategy to obtain the hay needed to cover grazing deficits. A side note, if your hay supply is the sole sourced from your farm and you experience a drought you will buy your hay twice that season. That is, the animal expenses of fertilizing and maintaining the stand, plus the expenses of purchasing new hay to replace the drought loss. A long-term strategy for your hay supply is the key to a reliable hay supply year-in and year-out.

Purchasing hay comes with a redeemable coupon. The value of that coupon is dependent by the nutrients in that bale of hay, the price of each nutrient, and how the hay is fed. A quick estimated could yield $30-$50 worth of nutrients as a rebate on the purchase price of the hay. However, there can be drawbacks to redeeming this coupon. First, if you feed hay in one location, concentrating all the off-farm nutrients will not provide much benefit the farm's pastures. Rotational feeding of hay around the farm will help disperse the nutrients across the pastures. Second, you may import weeds and undesirable plants to your farm potentially increasing costs to manage pastures.

Combine smaller breeding groups (bearing in mind step 1) after herd bull pull out to maximize grazing efficiency. This step can be most easily taken concurrently with Step 1. The goal of this step is to keep heifer groups, steer groups and bull groups together in large grazing groups to more effectively rotationally graze. An increase in grazing efficiency will pay off in terms of greater calf weights at weaning and just as importantly, extend the grazing season. If you have only one herd bull group, or this step is impractical due to pasture/cattle location, rotate grazing pastures as best fits your operation.

When should this be done? 60 Days + before weaning.

When should this be done? 60 Days + before weaning. A possible time is when herd bulls are pulled out. Combine smaller breeding groups (bearing in mind step 1) after herd bull pull out to maximize grazing efficiency. This step can be most easily taken concurrently with Step 1.

Whenever possible, fenceline wean. Fenceline weaning reduces the social stress calves experience during weaning. After separating calves from cows, place cows in an adjacent pasture to the calf pasture with fence to fence contact between. Keep cattle in these paddocks for 4 days. During the 7 day period cows may be moved to an additional part of the farm. This is done to increase time calves spend grazing.
Preventing and Treating Foot Rot

By: John Benner

This year has been a blessing in terms of forage production, spurred on by above average moisture. However, a wet summer often contributes to greater incidence of certain first sign of fall rain and green grass. Next time you are in this situation, consider confining livestock and feeding hay in order to grow grass. Grazing continuously—especially when plants are to be brought back from the summer slump—it can easily slow regrowth and reduce overall pasture tonnage. By pulling animals into a sacrifice field and feeding hay you can take advantage of good growing conditions to maximize production in pastures for grazing later in the fall. As an example, suppose you move 25 cows from a 50 acre pasture into a sacrifice field on September 1 and feed hay for a month. During that time your pasture could be growing at a rate of 25 pounds of dry matter per day. In a month’s time, the pasture will have produced about 20 tons of dry matter and you will have fed about 12.5 tons of hay to the cows. On the other hand if you graze the pasture continuously through September, there would be little to no net accumulation of forage. There may well be grazing through the remainder of the season, but it is day-to-day and ends when pasture stops growing. Alternatively, the 50 acres of rested pasture could be grazed in blocks or strips, in this scenario resulting in an extra 30 days of grazing season.

To take things a step further, get an even longer grazing season by planning to exclude livestock and stockpile some of your pasture through the entire fall. This requires some advanced planning to support livestock on limited acreage in fall or even to feed some hay when it seems illogical, but the result can be a significant reduction in overall feeding costs. On average, each acre of properly stockpiled forage pasture will provide about two months of winter grazing for one cow. At current hay prices, each month that beef cows are grazed extending animals to a sacrifice area or in order to rest pasture during times of stress or recovery. A little extra rest for your pasture will go a long way toward growing stronger root systems, more leaf area, more forage, and lower feeding costs.

Matt Booher is with the Augusta County Extension Office and serves on the VFGC Council.
which focused on low stress cattle handling techniques and proper injection practices in order for members of the BQA to maintain their certification. The second half of the program focused on the work of the conditions of the farm prior to the beginning of the pasture rotation project; explaining that Summerfield Farms during this time, and explained to everyone the benefits that he has received from its installation. After the implementation of the rotational grazing system an area that consisted of approximately ninety-two acres was divided into twelve paddocks. As part of the project the cattle were fenced out of the streams in the paddock system. Benefits received from the implementation of the system included: increased grazing efficiency, reduced stress on the animals and herself, reduced hay consumption in the winter, and that working the cattle has become easier. Other benefits that John has noticed are increased water quality in the streams on the farm, which John has observed by performing water quality tests himself, and increased wild life in the buffer areas along the streams due to an increase in available habitat.

Katelyn Cox, a grazing demonstration technician with the VFGC also explained her work on the farm during this portion of the event. Since May, Katelyn has been conducting pasture condition scores in the paddock system, collected soil samples, and performing other duties such as photographing the paddocks so that the VFGC can examine how the installation of a rotational grazing system affects and potentially improves soil health and productivity. Along with the others speakers there were also several fencing contractors and water system installers present at the event who spoke about their businesses so that others who were interested in implementing a similar rotational grazing system on their farms could establish contacts with people in the business.

Summerfield Front Page

Spray Hay & Pasture Now for Cleaner Fields Next Summer

By Matt Booher

Are any of the above weeds in your hay or pasture fields? Fall is a great time to spray for the biennial weeds shown above, as well as many others. Biennials- including most of our thistle species and wild carrot- have a life cycle that spans two years. The wild carrot flowers or 6 foot-tall thistles you see now are at the end of their life. Next year’s problem plants are starting right now as seedlings that will overwinter as rosettes and send up a flowering stalk late next spring. Sprayed in the seeding or rosette stages (fall to early-spring), these weeds are easy to kill. Spraying after plants begin their upright growth is a losing battle— often referred to as “recreational spraying”. So spray your pasture and hay fields this fall and wipe out the next generation of biennial weeds. As a bonus you’ll be hitting any perennial weeds as they send sugars (and herbicide) to roots for winter.

Below: Illustration of the life cycle and strategic timing of herbicide application for biennial thistles.

Katelyn Cox is with the Augusta County Extension Office and serves on the VFGC Council.

Re-explore Stockpiled Fescue for Time and Cost Savings

By: Matt Booher

With the rainy summer and good forage growth we’ve had so far this year, this season is shaping up to be a great one for fall stockpiling of pasture. Whether you are old or new to the practice of stockpiling fall pasture for winter grazing, take this opportunity to be reminded of your upcoming duties to make it happen. Now that we’ve hit August, find some way to remove the existing growth from the pasture to be stockpiled. Make hay, bushhog it, graze it – the goal is to remove mature and dead plant tissue and allow sunlight to get down to the young tillers that will provide the majority of fall growth. At this same time, apply nitrogen as either manure or fertilizer (around 50 lbs. of N/acre) if your pasture doesn’t have a significant legume component. While a nitrogen application is not necessarily required, it usually results in significantly more pasture tonnage, as well as significantly better protein and energy content of the forage. The most important part of the stockpiling process is to prevent animal access throughout the entire fall while growth is accumulating. While it is tempting to graze the stockpiled fescue on a limited basis, the best winter grazing will come from pasture where grass grew thick and un-grazed throughout fall. Then grown in this manner, the result is forage that remains green and nutritious underneath the brown canopy. In most cases you can pull back the stockpiled grass to reveal green growth far into winter – I have seen this even in late December and March.

So what can you expect to get out of stockpiled fescue? We’ve done multiple stockpiling demonstrations in the Shenandoah Valley in recent years, and have collected a pretty good bank of forage quality information and a decent feel for how much grazing time can be expected. One of the greatest benefits of stockpiling fescue for winter is that it has great forage quality that will meet the needs of virtually any group of animals. Crude protein values in December typically begin at around 13 -14%; energy values we have seen range from 67-70% total digestible nutrients (TDN). To give you some idea of how this meets animals’ needs, consider that a cow in early lactation will require a diet around 10% crude protein and, 59% total digestible nutrients. A quick comparison will show that fall calving cows grazing stockpiled fescue are getting better nutrition than those being fed virtually any first cutting hay and most second cuttings out there. Stockpiled fescue will lose some of its quality if left to sit over the winter months- more so quick comparison will show that fall calving cows grazing stockpiled fescue are getting better nutrition than those being fed virtually any first cutting hay and most second cutting hay out there. Stockpiled fescue will lose some of its quality if left to sit over the winter months- more so when weather is mild, but in most cases it will still test out at around 12% crude protein and 60% total digestible nutrients in January. In recent demonstrations in the Shenandoah Valley, stockpiled fescue that remained to be used in March still held an average quality of 11% crude protein and 57% total digestible nutrients.

How much acreage should be set aside for stockpiling? That depends greatly on how grazing is managed on the stockpile. If left to graze over the entire field, cattle will typically consume 50% or less of available forage – the rest is trampled or wasted. By restricting animal access to several days-worth of grazing at a time, we have seen animals use closer to 75-85% of available forage. So although it takes a little more labor, a strand of temporary fenced every 2 or 3 days can almost double the amount of feed that is captured from a stockpile pasture. In our demonstrations, stockpile yields ranged from 2,000-4,500 lbs. per acre, depending on rain and fertility. The cattle producers involved in the demonstrations reported as a whole, each acre stockpiled supported one mature cow for about 2.5 months. Labor requirements as reported by participants, were typically less than 30 minutes per day to move temporary fencing (usually fencing is set up for two moves and one wire is “lag-frogged” over the next). When all labor and expenses were figured, the cattle producers involved in the demonstrations reported that grazing stockpiled fescue resulted in significant time and cost savings.

Matt Booher is with the Augusta County Extension Office and serves on the VFGC Council.

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New Herbicide Options for Foxtail Control in Hay & Pasture

By: Matt Booher

Yellow, giant, and green foxtail are all common in Virginia. They are all clump forming summer annuals, spreading only by seed. Seeds germinate from late-May through mid-summer, often seeming to take over pasture and hay fields in August and September when they bloom and set seed.

The premier chemical for control of foxtail is quinclorac, marketed as Facet L or as the generic QuinStar. Quinclorac offers in-season preemergence and postemergence control of foxtail, as well as other summer annuals including fall panicum, crabgrass, barnyardgrass, and ragweed. Postemergence activity, however, is only effective on seedlings up to 3 or 4" tall. Even though most summer annual weeds like foxtail are not noticed until late in summer, they actually begin germinating in mid-May through June. Consequently, an application of quinclorac in late-May or early-June works best to control summer emerged grasses when they are small and to control seeds that have not yet germinated. Because quinclorac's effectiveness depends heavily on preemergence control, it is important that it be applied in situations that allow the spray to contact the ground (i.e. hay or thick pasture removed). It is advisable to make first cutting hay as usual, and plan to apply quinclorac as soon as hay is off the field. Quinclorac is not recommended to be mixed with liquid fertilizer, but it can be easily tankmixed with 2,4-D or dicamba. It must be mixed with a crop oil concentrate or methylated seed oil. There are no grazing restrictions with quinclorac; the only restriction is that you must wait at least 7 days after an application before you can cut it again for hay. Recently pendimethalin (Prowl H2O) received a supplemental label to allow its use in hay and pasture. Pendimethalin is strictly a preemergent herbicide, meaning it will have no effect on weeds that have already germinated. Good ground coverage must be achieved to obtain effective preemergence activity, therefore restricting applications to early spring or after hay removal. An early-spring application could lose efficacy by the time many weeds begin emerging. At the same time, an application after the first hay harvest will likely miss large flushes of summer annuals that have already emerged. There is no preharvest or pregrazing interval for Prowl H2O. It can be mixed with other herbicides such as 2,4-D or dicamba to control emerged broadleaf weeds. One last strike against Prowl H2O is that it stains everything it touches a mustard yellow color, making mixing and loading interesting. In summary, pendimethalin is an option but it is much more dependent on timing of application than quinclorac.

We are currently conducting herbicide trials to explore options for tankmixing quinclorac with pendimethalin, perfecting application timing, and tweaking herbicide rates. Contact your Extension agent for more information on upcoming demonstrations.

Matt Booher is with the Augusta County Extension Office and serves on the VFGC Council.

Forage Economics Page 7

- A few side notes: 1) annual leases do not support investment in grazing infrastructure and for these farms to be successful, most will rely on feeding hay. Negotiating long-term leases that support improved grazing infrastructure can be structured to benefit both the landlord and tenant and support eligibility for cost-share; 2) farmers with multiple farms that cannot be managed as a unit provide challenges to efficient grazing and in all likelihood must rely on hay feeding; and 3) machinery fixed costs are lower on diversified farms that make use of the standard or XR flat fan produce mainly fine or medium sized droplets that are subject to movement away from the target. Newer nozzles such as a chamber or air induction nozzle produce coarse to ultra-coarse droplets that resist drifting. This can mean better delivery to the target, particularly at higher wind speeds. The information below describes the step-wise evolution of nozzle technology. If you are looking to replace your old flat fan nozzles then any of the latest designs should be an improvement, but the chamber + induction nozzle is the latest and greatest for most applications.

Drift with a boom height of 24" and wind speed of 6-8 mph

Air-induction. The air-induction type nozzle produces large drops through the use of a venturi air aspirator for reducing drift. By incorporating air into the solution, a large droplet, air-fluid mixture is produced. Air induction nozzles operate from 30 -100 psi; an extended range option allows for an operating pressure down to 15 psi. Excellent for the systemic herbicides commonly used in pasture and hay.

Chamber + Induction. The latest in nozzle evolution is the Turbo TeeJet Induction (TTI), which is a chamber + air induction nozzle. Similarly to the air induction, it has an extremely wide pressure operating range, but results in even less driftable, fine droplets. Again, excellent for soil applied or systemic applications.

Interesting fact: Air-induction (Venturi-type) nozzles produce large droplets that resist drifting but that shatter on impact, providing improved coverage. Ex- amples of these nozzles include: Delavan AgSpray’s Raindrop Ultra, Greenleaf Technologies’ TurboDrop and AirMix. Lumarck’s Ultra Lo-drift, Spraying systems Co’s air induction AI and TTI, AJJ Ag Products’ Air Bubble Jet, Wilger Industries’ Combo-Jet.

Matt Booher is with the Augusta County Extension Office and serves on the VFGC Council.
President's Message

"When it Rains it Pours", so they say. Nothing could be truer for this year's growing season. We started off dry in March and April only to witness a late spring and so far this summer more rainfall than most are use to for this time of the year. Our good fortune has certainly left us in great shape to support continued forage growth for our livestock.

As we begin late summer and early fall, let us not forget the value of tall fescue. Fescue is certainly the abundant forage base of the majority of pastures in Virginia. Too often we focus on the negative aspects and forget about the positive potential it provides us and our livestock. With the proper use and management we can certainly use it to its fullest advantage.

Stockpiling tall fescue in late summer and early fall is certainly not a new concept to many livestock producers. This is the time to apply 50-60lbs. per acre of soluble nitrogen to fescue pastures. We need to remove livestock from the fertilized pastures until those pastures are subject to a hard killing frost in late October or November.

Once a hard frost occurs livestock can be placed back for late fall and early winter grazing. We often discredit the value of tall fescue that is endophyte infected. Waiting to graze infected tall fescue in the late fall and early winter helps to offset some of the negative aspects that the endophyte causes. You will more than likely find that the stockpiled tall fescue being grazed will have higher nutritional quality than most grass hay harvested annually in Virginia.

As we experience cattle prices that continue to be unsettled, we need livestock producers to take advantage of ways to maintain acceptable profit margins. It’s time to consider taking advantage of the abundant moisture most of us have been experiencing and decide how stockpiled fescue can fit and be utilized in our livestock operations.

VFGC has also been, along with other cooperating agencies, raining down a number of educational events this summer. We thank everyone who has had a part in these significant events.

On another positive note it is time for everyone to mark their calendars for January 22 thru 24, 2017. These are the dates for the 2017 American Forage and Grassland Council Annual Meeting to be held at the Hotel Roanoke in Roanoke, Virginia. The VFGC will be the host of this three day educational event. You won’t want to miss the opportunity to get updated on the cutting edge research being done in regard to forage production and management and visit with livestock producers form across the country. More information will follow as we get closer.

Until next time,
Jon Repair
President, VF GC

American Forage & Grassland Council
2017 Annual Conference
January 22-25 in Roanoke, VA
Registration Form

You may also register online at www.afgc.org. Questions? Please call AFGC at 800.944.2342.

Online registration ends January 18, 2017. After January 18, 2017, you must register on-site in Roanoke, VA.

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ADDITIONAL REGISTRATION OPTIONS

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Cancellations received in writing by January 1, 2017, will receive a full refund less $25 processing fee. Cancellations received after January 1, 2017, will not receive a refund. Any questions, please call AFGC at 800.944.2342.

Silvopasture From a Forester’s Perspective

By: Adam Downing

As an extension forester for nearly the past two decades it’s been fairly easy to engage private forest landowners, at least the ones who, for the most part, don’t consider themselves “farmers.” In my observations, landowners participating in and active forest management are generally those who see that as their primary land-based activity. Farmers, on the other hand, generally view their woods as a secondary land-based resource. As such, efforts to apply forest management principles and improve woodlot productivity may struggle behind more urgent needs. It is from this perspective that I began looking into various agro-forestry practices. Could they be a tool to better engage farm based woodlot owners? In particular, could silvopasture be a “bridge” between livestock producers and better forestry practices?

The first serious look I took into agroforestry was some work I had heard was going on in New York with Cornell University and livestock in the woods. Like every other for-ester, my first question, reaction really, was rooted in the fundamental teaching of “Cows are bad for forests.” Like so many things in life, it’s not that simple. The potential negative effects of livestock near trees has a lot to do with livestock management and that’s 180 degrees from simply turning cows loose in the woods for shade.

Fast forward several years to an opportunity to engage with this practice first hand. I’ve watched a silvopasture system go into an open field and I’ve “made silvopasture” out of existing woodlots. As a forester, I’ve had to turn some of my training around to not only increase long-term tree productivity and value but to incorporate annual components such as forage and livestock needs.

Before I’d enter a woodlot with an eye to regeneration of the forest stand and allocating growth resources to animal comfort and growing digestible cellulose (forage). Balancing these demands on a given piece of land is challenging and requires interdisciplinary knowledge and experience.

Silvopasture Page 3
Berea, Kentucky, August 29, 2016—The American Forage and Grassland Council (AFGC) will host its Annual Meeting January 22-24, 2016 at the Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center in Roanoke, Virginia. The theme is “Turning Grass into Ca$h: Opportunities in Grassland Agriculture.”

The 2017 AFGC Conference will begin with a tour highlighting two outstanding operations, Tuck Farm and Dawn Dairy. Tuck Farm will focus on their winter grazing program and Dawn Dairy will focus on their perennial forage base establishment. Both stops will provide attendees with a first-hand look at excellent forage management practices.

The conference will feature workshops focused on restorative grazing, market opportunities, pasture-based dairies, mob grazing, sheep production, and more. In addition to workshops, the conference offers scientific poster presentations; an outstanding exhibit hall representing seed, chemical, fencing and other industry companies and organizations; many networking opportunities; and several competitions such as the Forage Spokesperson, Emerging Scientist, Photo and Essay Contests.

According to AFGC President, Chris Agee, “we are extremely fortunate to have the guidance of producer and AFGC board member, Mark Kennedy serving as conference chair and Chris Teutsch and Matt Poore as program chairs. The entire 2017 planning team has put together an amazing program focused on the many facets of the forage industry providing value for everyone.” There are over 60 educational opportunities over the two-day conference qualifying for CEU credit in the Certified Forage and Grassland Professional designation program offered by AFGC.

Details and registration are available on the web at www.afgc.org. Or, contact AFGC at 1.800.944.2342 for information or questions and on page 10 of this newsletter.

The American Forage and Grassland Council is an organization comprised of 22 affiliate councils with over 2,500 members and is the leading voice for economically and environmentally sound forage-based agriculture. Founded in 1944, its primary objective is to bring producers, educators, scientists, and industry professionals together to promote and advance forages in agriculture.

Summerfield Farms Field Day

By: Katelyn Cox

As part of the project at Summerfield Farms, the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council (VFGC) in partnership with the Grayson County Cooperative Extension Service, and Virginia Farm Credit, hosted a Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification and summer field day at the farm on July 19, 2016. As part of the Program for the evening John Fant, the operator of Summerfield Farms, gave a tour of his newly renovated cattle working facility. John described the conditions of the old facility, which was built on a slope allowing erosion to take place and that working the cattle was very difficult, due to cattle being able to get over and through the fences. He also explained that his main concern in designing the facility was the safety of both his workers and the animals.

John Fant and a member of the Grayson County Cooperative Extension Service giving a chute side demonstration.

John and a representative from the Cooperative Extension Service also gave a cattle working demonstration.

Research efforts are now underway in the state. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) has provided a small amount of seed money to get research started while also addressing the legal and import issues we faced. Despite VDACS’ efforts to make things go smoothly, legal agreements with seed companies, law enforcement paperwork, shippers’ concerns about import hurdles, and burst bags of seed all were issues that delayed our plantings this season.

Still, the show has gone on. Virginia Tech and Virginia State University have focused on variety trials and agronomic management. JMU is working with farmer-cooperators to test hemp for bio-oil production on a field scale and the spent meal may become part of a poultry ration. Hemp may even have some potential use as a forage, but all of that will have to be part of a future article.

John Fike, Ph. D. is a Forage-Livestock and Biofuels Research with Virginia Tech’s Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences.

John Fike, Ph. D. is a Forage-Livestock and Biofuels Research with Virginia Tech’s Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences.

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