Buncombe County Center

Buncombe County Cattlemen’s Meeting

The next meeting of the Buncombe County Cattlemen’s Association will be on Thursday, May 7, 6:30 pm, at the Buncombe County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension.

At this meeting a speaker from WNC Communities will give us an update on the progress of the WNC Livestock Marketing facility. We will also hear from a representative from Buncombe Soil and Water Conservation about the Buncombe County Farmland Preservation program.

We will also need to elect a new slate of officers for the Association and discuss upcoming events for this year; please come to the meeting with ideas on both. We look forward to seeing you.

Beef Quality Assurance Certification Training

I mentioned in an earlier newsletter that we would hold a BQA certification training this year. The training will be held on Tuesday, May 12, at the Buncombe County Extension Center and will be open to all producers in Buncombe, Henderson and Transylvania Counties. The starting time will be 6:30 pm, and we should finish up by about 8:15 pm.

The purpose of this training is to certify beef producers in best management practices that deal with producing high-quality cattle. Producers have embraced BQA because it is the right thing to do, but they have also gained through increased profitability. As an educational program, BQA helps producers identify management processes that can be improved. BQA also reflects a positive public image and instills consumer confidence in the beef industry.

BQA is a program of the NC Cattlemen’s Association. They provide the educational materials and perform the required clerical work to record all BQA certified producers. For this reason, there is a $15 fee for NC Cattlemen’s Association members and a $40 fee for non-members. The difference, of course, is the membership fee to the NC Cattlemen’s Association.

Many of you called and expressed interest in this training. We ask that if you plan on attending this training, please call the Buncombe County Extension Center at 828-255-5522. This will allow us to have enough materials on hand for each producer to have his/her own copy.

Persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate in activities mentioned in this newsletter. Please contact Jeff Bradley at 828-255-5522 during business hours at least 3 days prior to the event to discuss accommodations.
**2009 WNC Beef Commission Field Day**

The WNC Beef Commission will hold a field day on Saturday, June 6, at the Warren Wilson College Farm. The field day will begin at 9:00 am at the farm. Speakers for the event include Chase Hubbard, Warren Wilson Farm Manager, Dr. Sue Ellen Johnson, NCSU Forage Specialist, Steve Duckett, Buncombe County Extension Director, and Dr. Jim Turner, NCSU Beef Specialist.

Topics to be covered include the management of the farm and how they are producing for alternative markets, a pasture walk with Dr. Johnson and a Research and Extension update with Dr. Turner. Lunch will be provided at the farm. Please preregister for the event with Linda Lamp at WNC Communities (828) 252-4783.

**Buncombe County Small Farms Initiative**

More and more farmers have been sharing with our agents their desire to continue farming, as well as the challenges they are facing in doing so. Farmers are desperately looking for ways to increase their income so they can keep their operation viable and their land preserved. Support given by our Buncombe County Commissioners and County Management has allowed Cooperative Extension to develop a Small Farms Initiative program to aggressively work towards helping both seasoned and new farmers through:

1. Providing educational programs focusing on farm planning, diversified crop production, adding value to products and marketing strategies.

2. Helping link farmers to local markets.

3. Seeking resources and funding for farmers through grant programs.

4. Providing assistance with value-added products through organizations such as Blue Ridge Food Ventures.

5. Linking aging landowners with aspiring farmers through Farm Transition Programs.

Recently, Melinda Roberts, Extension Agent, Agriculture-Small Farms, joined our staff in the position previously held by Jean Harrison. Melinda is new to Cooperative Extension but not to this region. She was born and raised in Statesville NC, growing up on a small farm that was dependent upon income derived from “Buy Local” programs. Her educational background also lies in Western North Carolina, spanning Haywood Community College, Western Carolina University and Appalachian State University.

You can contact Melinda for additional information or questions by calling the Buncombe County Center of NC Cooperative Extension 828-255-5522, or by emailing her at melinda_roberts@ncsu.edu.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY SMALL FARMS INITIATIVE WEBSITE:  [http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu/content/Buncombe+County+Small+Farms+Initiative](http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu/content/Buncombe+County+Small+Farms+Initiative)


Better Year Ahead?

As I reflect on the last two years of extreme drought and how we have been blessed over the last couple of months with a decent amount of rainfall, I can’t help but wonder what may lie ahead in the future for us in the livestock business. Being the optimistic person that I am, I really want to think that we are heading out of the drought and will receive the rainfall needed to help our forage crops thrive and to feed our animals adequately. Whether or not we get that much needed moisture, there are some points for you to consider this spring as we are watching our grass get ahead of our cattle.

Grazing Management

The spring of the year always provides abundant grass for our livestock. More times than not we have pastures that get ahead of us and start to seed out before we are able to turn our animals into them to graze. We normally run a bush hog through these pastures to clip the mature seed heads off so they can graze the higher quality leaf down below. This is more work on you and is costly from a fuel, time, and equipment maintenance standpoint.

I know you’ve heard me say it before, but I’ll say it again just in case you have forgotten. Rotational grazing is a key to managing our pastures effectively, and this practice can be applied to those pastures that tend to get ahead of you. We normally wait until our grass gets about 5-6 inches to turn our animals out in the spring. We seem to be worried that we won’t have enough grass if we turn out too early. In order to keep our pastures from getting too mature, it is a good practice to turn out a week or two earlier than normal and move the animals through your pastures in a quick rotation. Your animals will basically clip the tops off of your pastures, which is the portion that produces the seed heads that we normally have to clip off later in the grazing season. This will ensure that the animals aren’t grazing one section down too far, as well as keeping the grass from becoming too mature in all sections. The forage will be higher quality due to a stimulation of more vegetative growth and you will find that your pastures will last just as long or longer than they did with our traditional methods.

Fertility

Typically, most livestock producers fertilize pastures and hayfields in the spring. This is a practice that our fathers and grandfathers have taught us. While not a bad practice, we may be thinking about it in the wrong way. One thing wrong with “doing what we have always done” is that we apply the same fertilizer blend year after year. In many cases, our pastures do not need each of the three nutrients each year and we could save money by taking soil samples and knowing exactly what they need. If your pasture only needs nitrogen, you don’t want to waste your money on a 19-19-19 fertilizer that has the phosphate and potassium that you don’t need. You could save some money by applying the recommended rate of a 34-0-0. In addition, for most of us this spring application is the only fertilizer our fields get all year long. This practice is a major player in the problem with pastures getting ahead of us.

With hayfields, it is very important that we fertilize in the spring if we want to have good hay yields. By fertilizing our hayfields in the spring, we also can create ourselves a problem. Sometimes we end up with more hay than we can get across at the optimum time. When late June/early July gets here, and we’re still not finished making hay, we end up with lower quality hay. It’s important to pay close attention to fertilizing only the hay ground you know you can get across when the hay is at its optimum level. The rest is still going to be there and by the time you get to it, it will still be a lower quality.

It’s also very important to fertilize our spring pastures in order to take advantage of the spring flush of grass; however, I think we need to start looking at it from a different angle. By applying all of our fertilizer in the spring, we are wasting some of those fertilizer dollars on that grass that our livestock cannot keep up with—this is the grass mentioned earlier that becomes too mature and puts on those seed heads. If you plan to rotate on a regular basis to keep the grass in a vegetative state, then you might do OK with a spring application only; but I think we need to start thinking about a fall application on some of our pastures.

By applying some of our fertilizer in the fall (mid-August to early-September), we will be encouraging our fall growth. By applying 60-75 lbs of nitrogen per acre, our grass will grow much better, allowing us to stockpile some grass which will extend our grazing season into the winter months. This practice has the potential to dramatically reduce the amount of hay we need during those winter months, which will decrease the amount of hay we need to fertilize and make during the spring
Summer Annuals

Once again, I have to mention the benefit of summer annuals to a grazing system. We all know that in the heat of the summer our fescue pastures are gone. This is due to the fact that fescue is a cool season grass and it goes dormant in the hottest part of the summer. I realize that all producers don’t have the land available to plant warm season annuals, but this is a practice that needs be looked at a little closer by everyone. Most of the warm season annuals that I will mention have pretty decent drought tolerance and will respond to even small amounts of rainfall.

Sorghum/sudangrass, pearl millet, crabgrass varieties and teff grass are all options for producers in Western North Carolina. Any of these grasses can be grazed or made into hay. I personally feel they would have the most benefit in a grazing system. Each of these grasses should be planted in mid May and allowed to become established prior to grazing. Once you turn the animals into the established stand, graze down to about 6 inches and remove the animals from the field. This process can be repeated as many as 3-4 times throughout the summer, depending on rainfall. This can be a huge benefit to your fescue pastures that really need a rest during those summer months.

The ideal setting for planting summer annuals is a fenced cropland setting. The reason this is ideal, is due to the fact that you can dedicate this “pasture” solely to a summer annual/winter annual rotation. You will use it for grazing in the summer and graze it down in the ground around September when it is time to plant your winter annuals for grazing. I will note that if your summer annual gets ahead of you for some reason, you may also make hay or haylage out of this crop. After your winter annual becomes established, you then have repeated grazing throughout the winter months. In this setting, neither the summer or winter annual is competing at any time with your fescue pastures because it is solely dedicated to these two annual crops. You may also drill these summer annuals into existing fescue pastures, but you will need to graze them really close about the time fescue starts coming back out in the fall. Once you have grazed it close, remove the animals and allow the fescue to get ahead of the summer annual that is starting to decline in regrowth.

The best way to plant these annuals is with a no-till drill. Buncombe Soil & Water Conservation has a drill to rent to producers. There are also other locations that rent no-till drills. If you have any questions about your livestock operation, feel free to call Jeff Bradley at 828-255-5522.

Direct Marketing Meat Workshop

Please save the date! A Direct Marketing of Meat Workshop will be held on Tuesday, July 7, from 8:30 am to 12:00 pm, at the Madison County Center of NC Cooperative Extension. Topics covered will be: Meat Handling License, Extending Your Grazing Season, Marketing, Budgets and possibly a Producer Panel. More details will be coming soon!

WNC Dairy Herd Improvement Association, Inc (DHIA) Awards (for 2008 Year)

Dairy herds participating in the DHIA program were recognized at their annual awards program on Thursday, April 16. The WNC DHIA program includes dairy herds in Henderson, Buncombe, Madison and Yancey Counties. Congratulations to all of our winners! The awards are as follows:

1. Reproductive Award — LYNN BONHAM
2. Milk Quality Award — 4-M ACRES DAIRY, INC.
3. Highest Individual Cow Actual Milk Award 2 X — 4-M ACRES DAIRY, INC.
4. Highest Individual Cow Actual Milk Award 3 X — TAPROOT DAIRY
5. High Herd in Milk 2 X — 4-M ACRES DAIRY, INC.
6. High Herd in Milk 3X — TAPROOT DAIRY
7. WNC DHIA, Inc. Dairy of the Year 2008 — AUBREY WELLS
Producing High Quality Hay

Hay is an integral part of most beef production systems in the southeast. Producers can either produce their own hay or purchase it from a hay producer. It is vital for livestock producers to understand the processes of growing, harvesting and storing hay if they are producing their own hay or purchasing their hay. These processes influence the nutritive value of the hay which can alter livestock performance. By understanding the changes that can take place during hay production the nutritional program can be altered to maintain livestock performance.

♦ Prior to the hay season and before each harvest all hay equipment should be thoroughly examined and serviced. All equipment should be greased, gear oil levels should be checked and filled, wheel bearings should be serviced, tires should be checked and inflated. Mower sections and blades need to be sharpened or replaced prior to the start of the haying season and should be checked before each mowing. Failure to ensure that the haying equipment is in good working condition can delay harvest. This delay in harvest results in an inestimable amount of damaged hay on a yearly basis.

♦ Hay should be harvested at the point when quantity and quality are both optimized. Factors such as weather, equipment failures, off-farm employment and other obligations can lead to delaying the harvest of hay. Forage quality typically decreases with increasing maturity. As forages mature, the leaf-to-stem ratio decreases. Higher proportions of stem result in higher concentrations of fiber and lower concentrations of crude protein and digestible dry matter. The management of forages crops is not just limited to producing a single high-quality crop. Most forages that are utilized for hay need time for adequate regrowth to maintain the stand. Cool-season grasses such as tall fescue and orchardgrass should be harvested at the boot or early heading stages of growth for the first cutting and then at 45-60 day intervals thereafter. These harvest times should provide the best compromise between nutritive value and yield whenever possible.

Storage of hay at the edge of the hay field on the ground leads to greater deterioration of the hay. Approximately 50 percent of the storage losses can be attributed to the soil/hay interface when hay is stored outside and on the ground. Dry hay acts like a wick drawing moisture out of the soil and into the hay bale. Air movement may not be as great around the bottom of the bale as it is around the top. This can be affected by the shape, and density of the bale and the storage site. Improper storage can lead to moist conditions within the bottom of the bale that promote microbial activity.

Numerous methods have been used to elevate hay stored in the open. These include using telephone poles, pallets, railroad ties and pipe to raise the hay off of the ground. These bases should allow for some air movement under the bales and also prevent the hay from sitting in standing water. The storage site for hay stored outside should be in a sunny, breezy, well-drained area. This location should be near the top of a slope if possible and have a southern exposure. Rows should be oriented so they run up and down the slope, as rows running across the slope will trap runoff after a rainfall event. Bales should be butted up against each other within a row while adjacent rows should not touch, with a gap of at least three feet between rows.

2009 Regional Hay Project

Dr. Jim Turner has asked the Agricultural agents in a five-county area to participate in a regional hay project. The objective of this project is to determine the accuracy of producers in estimating the weights of bales produced by their own equipment. A secondary objective is to illustrate how different storage conditions affect storage losses.

The project will be conducted in the spring and fall of 2009. First-cutting, cool-season grass hay will be baled by the producers under normal conditions. Local Cooperative Extension agents and the Area Livestock Specialist will then come to the hay storage site to weigh and sample the bales. A total of ten bales will be sampled at each farm. These bales will be marked with spray paint to identify them for future weighing and sampling. Prior to the beginning of the hay feeding season (approximately Nov. 15) the same bales will be weighed and sampled again. A survey will be conducted at each location to determine the producer’s methods and what they expect the bales to weigh at each date.

We are looking for a maximum of ten cooperators in each county. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Jeff Bradley at 828-255-5522.

Did you know that you can get this newsletter via email? If you are interested, please contact us either by phone at 828-255-5522 or email at deanna_jordan@ncsu.edu.
Update on WNC Regional Livestock Marketing Project

Thanks to the continued cooperation and collaboration with area producers, progress on the WNC Regional Livestock Center continues moving forward. Preliminary funding has been made available to begin the site engineering and investigation work as soon as the lease agreement with International Paper has been finalized.

Construction funding decisions have been deferred and will be considered in June by the Golden LEAF Foundation and the NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission. Provided this funding is available in June, construction can be completed by December with the market opening in early 2010.

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