



News from Your Extension Agent

Native Pasture Restoration

7/18/19

Where to begin on this one... Because I know what you're going to say, "you want me to kill off my intensely managed bermudagrass for what now?!!" This was my first reaction as well.

Now let me explain- restoring native grasslands has always been an option and is just now becoming increasingly popular with the power of "trends" and the internet. There is more and more research being done that indicates the added value of grazing cattle on native forages and grasslands, rather than a monoculture or improved forages such as bermudagrass. Native forages and grasslands also provide a better habitat for wildlife.

The idea of re-introducing native pasture goes a bit like this: we look at the web soil survey and learn what specific soil type is on your property (this is different than analyzing soil nutrient quality). We would work with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to research the native plants and grasses that would have grown in this area, in the specific type of soil. Then NRCS will develop a "recipe" of seeds and a protocol to begin establishing and planting the native plants and grasses. For instance, a Brown-eyed Susan bush would be considered a "forb" for deer to eat instead of the "weed" it is in a bermudagrass pasture.

Pros of native pasture restoration: Native forages need less maintenance and potentially less fertilizer, biodiversity promotes soil health and provides nutrients for the soil. Some of the plants would be a built-in cover crop during winter or drought situations. There is potential for re-introducing the Bob-White Quail, as this would be a better, safer and appropriate habitat for them. Biodiversity could be more aesthetically pleasing.

Cons of native pasture restoration: It could take three years PLUS to fully establish all the plants and grasses, if quail were released, there is no guarantee they would survive (this heavily depends on the amount of forages they can use for nesting and food sources available). Stocking rates for cattle would need to decrease and a new livestock management plan would need to be established (this is not necessarily a bad thing, but it would be a BIG CHANGE).

Other key points: is restoring native grasslands for you? If time is a factor for managing your land and forage (and you also have a real, full-time job)- this might be an opportunity for you. If grazing livestock is a hobby and you're interested in a wildlife habitat as well, this might be an opportunity for you. If you are struggling with fertilizer and pesticide rising costs and still not maintaining enough forages for grazing, this might be an opportunity for you. If you are strictly a large-scale cattle operation, this opportunity is not for you. If you plan to utilize intense management of pasture, rotational grazing and increased stocking rates (herd size), this is not for you. There is no research indicating either native grasslands or improved forages is better or worse for feral hog populations.

Native pasture restoration definitely has its place, but we need to personally discuss your goals, situation, interests, management plan, and financials before making any decisions. This is also not something the county extension agent alone would decide for you. This opportunity would need to be evaluated by an NRCS representative, the county wildlife biologist, Extension specialists and the county extension agent. If this has piqued your interest, please contact me directly to set up an informational meeting- 903-856-5005, kaycee.davis@ag.tamu.edu

FAW update: no armyworms or adult male moths were found in either pastures this week.

House Fly Demo update: The Captivator pheromone trap has been the most effective at trapping and killing house flies. The Cyanorox and Quickbait baits have been close second/thirds respectively.

All data and recommendations are based on Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Resources