

Comanche County Agriculture Newsletter

Early-Season Weed Control in Hay Fields

If you have spring and winter weeds and/or a history of grassburs in your hay fields, you should consider a spring spray treatment. You have many options for broadleaf weed control, and a few for weedy grasses. One of the more effective low-cost treatments for spring broadleaf and grassy weeds is a treatment of glyphosate. Glyphosate will only kill what is green, so as long as your bermudagrass is still dormant you are safe.

Most of you know glyphosate by the product name Roundup. Glyphosate will do an excellent job of killing both winter annual broadleaf's as well as grasses. If you time your spray properly it will also provide very good control of grassburs. Grassburs typically green-up before bermudagrass, so you have a window when you can have good control on the grassburs, just before the bermuda greens up. Many will make a second application of glyphosate after baling first cutting. Again, the grassburs will green-up before the bermudagrass.

The recommended rate of glyphosate is 11 ounces per acre. While bermudagrass will usually recover from glyphosate applications, you need to be careful that your bermudagrass has not greened-up. You can affect 1st cutting yields by applying too late. This is probably the cheapest and most effective spring weed control treatment available for hay meadows. This year it looks like we are going to have a very early spring, so if you are considering a glyphosate application on your meadows, you will want to do so pretty soon.

Topdressing Small Grains (Continued on next page)

Whether you are growing small grains for grain, grazing or hay or silage production, proper timing of topdressing is critical to your overall yield. Timing is especially critical if you are planning to harvest grain. Regardless of how you are using your small grains, ideally topdressing will occur in time for the N to be moved into the rootzone well before jointing (Feekes 5) begins. Timing is the most important aspect in getting the most economic benefit from your nitrogen topdress input cost.

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Jointing or the growth stage Feekes 5 in small grains refers to the time in the development of the plant when an individual stem now has a node in it (the stem is elongating as the head has been initiated). After this point most all tillering of the plant will cease. If you see a few plants showing signs of jointing across the field and you have yet to topdress, you should do so as soon as possible and then water-in or hope for some moisture to move N into the root zone.

Why is it important to topdress while plants are still tillering and what is tillering? Tillers are additional stems that develop off the main shoot of the plant. Primary tillers form in the axils of the first four or more true leaves of the main stem. Secondary tillers may develop from the base of primary tillers if conditions favor tiller development. So, in a nutshell tillering is what adds additional forage to your stand, thickens it up. Even a thin stand of small grains can benefit from topdressing as it will help increase tillering and help to compensate for a thin stand.

When will we reach jointing or Feekes 5? It seems each year this question gets harder to answer. It is more dependent on weather than the calendar for this reason scouting is the most accurate means of determining jointing. However, an average time frame would probably be mid-March. During a drier year like this if you see some moisture in the forecast this time of year, it is probably best to go ahead and get your topdress out. Unless, a heavy rain of several inches is predicted then you would stand the chance of losing some N to runoff.

Typically, UAN or Urea are utilized for topdressing small grains, but topdress sources for N vary and I recommend you check prices for your best option. If applying early and using urea, you might consider a mixture of coated and uncoated urea to provide some initial N and some later released N. For grain production a rule of thumb is 1.5 to 2 pound of N per bushel of estimated grain. For grazing typically 50 to 60 units of N are suggested.

Removing Cattle for Grain Production (Continued on next page)

First hollow stem (FHS) is the critical period to remove cattle from wheat to protect grain yield. It occurs after the wheat is released from dormancy in the spring, and there is about 5/8 inch (1.5 centimeters) of hollow stem (roughly the diameter of a dime) below the developing head. Varieties can differ by up to 3 weeks in first hollow stem date. To look for FHS, start by digging up some plants from fields that have not been grazed. Select the largest tillers to examine.

Cut off the top of the plant, about an inch above the soil surface. Then slice the stem open from the crown area up. Look for the developing head, which will be very small. Next, see if you can find any hollow stem between the developing head and the crown area. If there is any separation between the growing point and crown, the wheat plant is at FHS. FHS will occur between a few days and a week or more prior to jointing, depending on temperatures.

It is important to mention that the net return from cattle increases as the grazing season is increased due to daily gain. However, net returns from grain decrease rapidly when grazing is continued after jointing. Beef gains after jointing generally do not compensate for lost grain yield. In general, net returns are less negatively impacted by removing cattle early and giving up a few days of beef gain than by continuing to graze a few days after jointing.

Sorghums

Before Sugar Cane Aphids (SCA) forage sorghum, sudangrass and haygrazers were a big crop in the area. Around 2014 we started seeing considerable damage to these forage crops from the SCA, since then the acreage of these crops has probably dropped 90% in the area. This is unfortunate as these are good crops for our area. Forage sorghum has always been a low maintenance, drought hardy crop with good value. Before SCA there were very few insect pests to worry about with the crop. In the last few years there has been a lot of research done on sorghums and the SCA. The result is we now have some identified sorghum and sorghum crosses that are more tolerant to SCA.

We also have a couple of good pesticides and have developed some effective treatment protocols. This offers you a good option if you are considering a summer annual forage crop. This is especially true in a year where the moisture may not be there for a dryland corn crop. Ask one of our good local seed salesmen about SCA tolerant varieties and treatment options. Remember resistance is not immunity, and the SCA may still be a problem on resistant hybrids, you will still need to monitor your fields and apply an insecticide or take an early harvest if infestations increase to where leaf damage is occurring. While we like to wait until soil temperatures are in the 60 to 65 degree range to plant sorghum, planting as early as possible helps to get the crop large enough to harvest before the SCA populations get to the point that severe damage occurs. Having the ability to harvest for either hay or silage within a week to 10 days after infestation is also important. The longer you wait the more damage and yield loss.

Upcoming Programs:

Early-Season Pecan Program

The Comanche County Pecan Committee and the Comanche County AgriLife Extension office will be hosting the annual Early Season Pecan Production Program on Friday, March 6th at the DeLeon City Auditorium. Registration will start at 9:30 and the meeting will run from 10:00 AM until 2:00 PM. This year we have some excellent speakers covering topics that are of concern to Comanche County producers. Dr. Charlie Graham Pecan Specialist with the Samuel Noble Roberts Foundation will be discussing “Pecan Tree Pollination”. He will also be talking about “Pecan Disease Issues and Management”. Dr. Larry Stein Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Department Head Horticulture will be discussing “Pruning and Thinning Both Native and Established Orchards, Methods and Benefits”. There will be 2 CEU’s, 1 IPM and 1 general offered. Lunch will be provided by our great local sponsors.

Dairy Animal Handling Certificate Training

This training for workers and managers will be held on Tuesday, March 24th from 10:00 AM until 3:00 PM at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research & Extension Center in Stephenville. The program will focus on Dystocia and Management of Colostrum, with hands-on demonstrations of proper calf pulling methods. The training will be offered in Spanish and English and a 4-hour Dairy Animal Handling Certificate DAHC will be awarded to attendees. Lunch will be provided by Purina Feeds. Please call the office to RSVP, 325-356-2539.

Peanut Production Program

This program will be held mid-March. We are waiting on confirmation from specialists to set the final date. Stay tuned for more information. We will have Dr. Cason discussing variety selection and Dr. James Gricher will be talking about season-long fungicide programs for local peanut producers. The program will offer 1 CEU, IPM. The meal will be sponsored by our great local sponsors.

Spring Dairy DOPA Training (Continued on next page)

This year the Spring DOPA Training for dairymen will be held at the AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Stephenville on Tuesday, April 7th. The program will consist of a morning and afternoon session.

Spring Dairy DOPA Training (Cont.)

Registration for the morning session will begin at 9:30AM and the program will begin at 10:00AM. The afternoon session will begin at 1:00PM and end at 4:00PM. We have an excellent line up of presentations planned for the meeting, topics include: Well Regulation and Management, Soil testing, Sand Bedding and Manure Management, Manure Management Options and New Technologies and Manure Management Regulations.

There will be 5 total DOPA credits offered, 2 DOPA credits for the morning session and 3 for the afternoon session. Lunch will be sponsored by our excellent local agriculture sponsors. This is going to be an excellent program, be sure to get it on your calendar.

Cross Timbers Land Symposium “Tank Construction and Management Program”

This multi-county program will be held on Thursday, April 16th at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Stephenville. Registration will begin at 9:30, the program will start at 10:00 AM and run until 1:30 PM. The program will cover tank construction and management. There will be 1 CEU provided. Lunch will be covered by local sponsors.

Small Grain Turn-Row Meeting

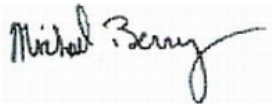
Small grain for forage production is one of the largest crops grown in Comanche County and the surrounding areas. While this year has not been typical, small grains are typically one of our more reliable crops, especially on dryland fields. For the last several years the Comanche County Agents office along with the Small Grain Specialist for Texas A&M Crop Sciences Department have conducted small grain research trials in the county. These trials include over 40 varieties of small grains including; wheat, oats, rye, triticale, barley and ryegrass, as well as some blends of grains.

We will be hosting a small grain tour of the trials in mid-April; the date will be dependent on harvest and the stage of the crop. We will have more information as we get closer to the date. This is an excellent opportunity to view many species and varieties of small grains and get a side-by-side comparison.

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Despite the predictions we have gone from warm, dry conditions to wet and cold. We badly need to get some additional soil moisture going into this year's growing season, so this change in the weather, despite being uncomfortable and hard on February calving herds, has been a blessing. Before these last couple of rainfall events our subsoil moisture levels were pretty poor and would have made for a tough start to the growing season. The moisture has sure been a boon for small grains, most in the county are now looking very good and providing some much-needed grazing.

Despite the current blessings of moisture, predictions still show an equal chance of dry or wet conditions throughout the spring and summer with higher than average temperatures. I would encourage everyone to plan their planting and management decisions around the possibility of below average rainfall. I profoundly hope the forecast will prove wrong and we have rainfall throughout the growing season, but it pays to be prepared.



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