

# MCCULLOCH COUNTY AG NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY

## FERTILIZATION IN SMALL GRAINS

Base fertilization programs on long-time averages and not on last year's production performance alone. Follow sound, consistent fertilization and soil management practices flexible enough to cope with seasonal moisture changes. Moderate nitrogen and phosphorus rates give economical yield increases in seasons of adequate rainfall. Application of Potassium, Sulfur and other nutrients are not common in our region.

A soil test is the best way to determine fertilizer need. The amount of a given nutrient to apply depends on: the quantity of that nutrient remaining in the soil, cropping history, organic matter, available moisture, grazing practices and general management. For proper fertilizer recommendations a completed information sheet needs to accompany the sample(s) to the Soil Testing Laboratory.

Small grains which are grazed need more fertilizer than ungrazed grain. Nitrogen increases forage production but grazing also removes much of the nitrogen applied in the fall. Stocker cattle gain approximately one pound for every ten pounds of dry matter consumed. Ten pounds of forage contains 0.4 pounds of nitrogen. For each 1 pound of beef produced on wheat pasture, 0.4 pound of nitrogen has been removed from the soil. If the livestock are removed before the joint stage of wheat, and conditions are favorable for grain production, replace the removed nitrogen by spring topdressing to harvest a normal grain crop. Nitrogen requirements are also higher when small grains follow grain sorghum and other high residue crops because of nitrogen immobility in the stalk decay process.

Applying fertilizer with the seed has proven to be a very efficient practice. All of the required phosphorus and up to 16 pounds of nitrogen per acre can be placed with the seed at planting. This practice increases early growth, root development, tillering, winter hardiness and resistance to diseases and insects. If Potassium is being applied with the seed be careful not damage the young seedling by applying too much fertilizer (actual Nitrogen and Potassium combined should be below 30 pounds per acre).

Split fertilizer applications are preferred. Incorporate one-third to one-half of the nitrogen and all of the phosphorus into the soil before or at seeding time. Apply the remaining nitrogen just prior to jointing. Field demonstrations have shown a split application of nitrogen has a yield advantage over preplant applications. If all the nitrogen is applied in the fall, excessive growth of ungrazed forage may occur and chances of freeze damage are increased. Nitrate leaching or denitrification can also occur reducing the amount of nitrogen available to the crop in the Spring.

Without soil test information, the following general rates of nitrogen and phosphorus are suggested for dryland production, except when following heavily fertilized crops where no phosphorus may be needed or where a nitrogen-producing legume (if used as a green manure crop and not harvested for grain) has preceded small grain:

See Figure 1 for details

Figure 1

Forage Production	Fertilizer Recommendation
Not grazed	Fifteen pounds of nitrogen plus 20 pounds of phosphate in the fall, followed by 30 to 50 pounds of nitrogen in the spring, if moisture is adequate.
To be grazed	Thirty pounds of nitrogen plus 30 pounds phosphate in the fall, followed by a spring application of nitrogen based on grain yield projections. The fall nitrogen application is for forage production. Base the spring nitrogen application on potential grain yield (generally 1.5 to 2.0 pounds of nitrogen is applied for each bushel of estimated yield). Some estimates of nitrogen removal by stocker cattle is that 0.4 pound of nitrogen is removed for each 1 pound of beef gain produced.



## WHAT'S THAT SMELL??

Spring is approaching in the Texas Hill Country, and the minds and hearts of young skunks turn to thoughts of love – which, unfortunately, can have deadly consequences for the amorous varmints. The month of February, which ironically holds Valentine's Day, kicks off the skunk breeding season.

These shy, cat-sized animals hit the road. In their nocturnal quests to find mates, males often venture onto highways and rarely make it across alive. Instead of the humorous antics of famous cartoon skunk Pepé le Pew, the results are often closer to the Valentine's Day Massacre.

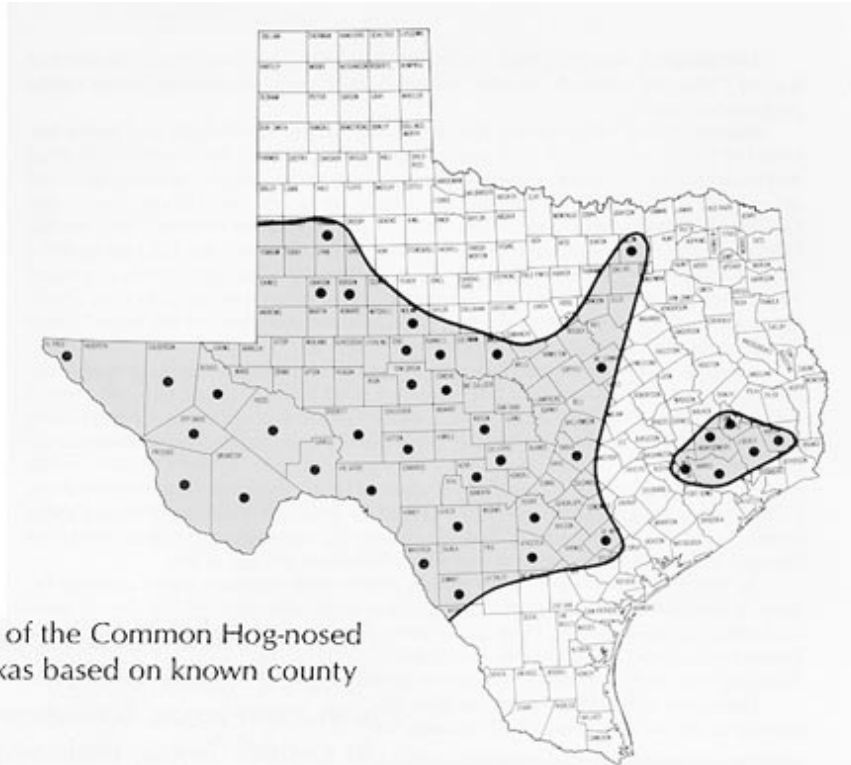
"We see more numbers of roadkill skunks in February and March than other times of the year," Robert Dowler, a biologist with Angelo State University, told [Texas Parks & Wildlife](#). "Preliminary data suggests that roadkill rates of skunks may double in parts of Texas during mating season."

February through March is mating season for striped, hog-nosed, and hooded skunks, and that translates into "skunk smell" all over the Hill Country.

The stench occurs when males try to court females who may not be "in the mood." During mating season, females produce an even greater stench that wards off suitors – and can spray a noxious sulfurous musk 15 feet when they're not in the mood.

In early May, the young are born, with average litters consisting of five offspring. Some females have two litters a year, but one litter per year is more common. The nursery is a cavity under a rock, a burrow, or a thicket of cactus or other protective vegetation. Usually the mother builds a nest of dried grasses and weed stems for the blind, helpless young. Baby skunks must remain hidden in their nest until they can see and are strong enough to follow their mother.

So, as nature runs its course over the next few months, be prepared to wear a gas mask when you're driving down the road. Or at least keep a can of Febreze in your car. For a DIY recipe to rid your car of the stench, visit [www.247wildlife.com](http://www.247wildlife.com).



Baxter, E. (2016, January 18). Ooooh, That Smell...Must Be Skunk Mating Season. Retrieved from <https://texashillcountry.com/ooooh-smell-must-skunk-mating-season/>

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