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Headline: Hay and Forage Options

WARSAW, Mo. – In central Missouri, growing conditions for cool-season grasses this spring have been less than ideal, to say the least. Many pastures and hay fields are already beginning to head out, but there is very little undergrowth to contribute to yield. There is certainly concern about the forage supply for both grazing and hay production.

Options for summer forage production include hybrid forage sorghum, sudan grass, pearl millet, and teff. These forages all have advantages and disadvantages. With the exception of teff, these forages can be used for either pasture or conserved as hay or haylage.

The forage sorghums and millet need 45 to 60 days of growth before harvesting. Plantings made in mid-May should have forage available for harvest around the first part of July. Fertilizer recommendations are about 60 pounds of nitrogen at planting.

Teff is relatively new to this part of the world. It is a warm-season annual grass native to Ethiopia, where it is mainly used as a cereal crop. It is finer stemmed than the sorghums or millets, but still requires 50 to 60 days from planting to harvest. Because of its' root structure, teff is recommended to be harvested as a hay crop.

Winter annuals, including rye, wheat, and triticale, can also be harvest for hay or haylage. This should be done as soon as possible. The goal is to harvest these crops while still in the boot stage to have adequate forage quality resulting in acceptable animal nutrient intake. Delaying harvest until these plants are more mature in the hopes of getting more tonnage will accomplish that goal. However, the resulting forage will be of very low quality. This will reduce intake and require additional supplementation.

Producers may want to consider looking into contracting corn acres for silage harvest. Estimates are one ton of silage per 5 bushel of grain if the corn is stressed or one ton of silage per 6 to 7 bushel of grain under more normal growing conditions. Corn silage should probably be limited to less than 50 percent of diet dry matter for beef cows, due to the increased energy density of that feed. Rough calculations indicate one acre of

corn silage could provide 120 days of feed for 6 to 8 cows with one-half of the diet coming from corn silage.

The bottom line is that there are forage options available, but producers need to act soon. Summer annuals planted now will not be ready for harvest until early July. Winter annuals should be harvested for hay or haylage as soon as possible. Consider planning for the possible use of corn silage to supplement a short hay crop next winter. As always, these options are weather dependent.

If you have additional questions, contact me by e-mail at schmitze@missouri.edu or at the Benton County Extension Center in Warsaw at 660-438-5012.

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