

Ag Column
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Bank Late Season Fescue Growth for Savings

Both and dry and wet times have been noted this year. Due to dryer weather, the spring hay crop was about half of what many producers are used to getting. If we continue to get rainfall, mid-August is a great time to consider stockpiling fescue.

UT Extension Research has shown that hay production and feeding is the most expensive part of livestock production. Stockpiling fescue can provide a good source of forage later in the fall or early winter reducing the need for winter feed.

The cattle can harvest the stockpiled fescue, quality forage, helping to maintain body condition into the winter. According to Dr. Gary Bates, UT Extension Forage Specialist, stock piled fescue has tested as 11 to 12 percent protein, much like good orchardgrass hay.

Bates says stockpiling will accomplish the following:

- Provide 45 – 60 days extra grazing in fall
- Maintain quality into early winter
- Be higher in quality than the average hay in Tennessee
- Cost half as much as the same amount of forage put up as hay

The steps for stock piling tall fescue are simple. Just clip or graze pastures in mid August to remove all summer growth. A hay field can be used for stock piling after the late summer cutting.

If there is good soil moisture, apply 60 pounds of actual nitrogen. Bates says this should net 1 to 2 tons of additional forage per acre. Without rain, the grass will not grow and the nitrogen will not be utilized. This will not work in a drought situation. Make sure to keep the cattle or other livestock off of the pasture or hayfield until after frost. This will allow for the maximum accumulation of forage for later grazing.

Then, after pasture growth slows, the stock piled forage can be used in the place of feeding hay. The forage can be best utilized by strip grazing. This can be accomplished by the use of a single strand of electric fence stretched across a field. Just move the fence as needed exposing a new strip of forage as needed.