Winter Forage Options

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Overview

- Why?
- Planted forage options
- Planting dates, rates, and methods
Why worry about winter?
Grass Types

- Although animals eat year round, there is no “all season” forage

- Cool season \((C_3)\) grass
- Warm season \((C_4)\) grass
- Legumes

  - Differ in their leaf anatomies and enzymes used to carry out photosynthesis
    - Optimal growing conditions
    - Nitrogen and water use efficiency
    - Forage quality
    - Seasonal production profile
Perennial Pasture Productivity
Options

• Scenerio: Maria has 5 acres and two horses. Her pastures are well established with bahia.

• Option A: Graze year round
• Option B: Supplement with hay through the cool season
• Option C: Plant cool season forages
Option A – Graze Year Round

• **Pros**
  – Cheapest in the (very) short run

• **Cons**
  – Horses will not be receiving adequate nutrition from late maturity bahia
  – Bahia no longer growing and cannot replace grazed leaves – leads to diminished roots – and eventually may kill plant
Option B – Purchase Hay

• **Pros**
  – Can provide forages without making changes to existing pasture
  – High quality hay will meet animals roughage needs and deter grazing of dormant grasses

• **Cons**
  – Can be expensive
  – Sometimes difficult to locate high quality hay
  – Requires storage
Option C – Plant Winter Forages

• **Pros**
  – Allows animal to continue to graze without depleting dormant grasses
  – Generally high nutritive value
  – Plant material adds nutrients back to the soil
  – Eye appealing

• **Cons**
  – Success is very weather dependent
  – Requires time, money, and equipment to establish
Rye Grass

- **Production season:** Jan-May
- **Nutritive Value:** High digestibility and CP
- **Soil Preference:** sandy-loam or clay-loam, 5.5-7.5pH
- **Weather:** Cold tolerant to 12 degrees, requires moisture retention in soil, minimum 35 inches of rain
- **Planting:** Plant late October-November, 20-30lb/acre
- **Caution:** Graze low in spring to prevent competition with warm season perennials
Small Grains

- Offer rapid, vigorous growth, and early grazing after planting
- Most productive when planted on a prepared seed bed with a drill
- Susceptible to disease
Oat

- **Production season:** Dec-Apr
- **Nutritive Value:** Very palatable, NV drops after a freeze
- **Weather:** 25-65 inches
- **Soil Preference:** Sandy-loam or clay-loam, 5.5-7pH
- **Planting:** Plant October-November for grazing, 100-120lb/acre
- **Caution:** Smutted oats can pose a problem for horses, goats, and pregnant cattle. Susceptible to fungal rusts. Not tolerant of close grazing.
Rye

- **Production season:** Nov-April
- **Nutritive Value:** Varies with maturity, M-H CP, M-H digestibility
- **Soil Preference:** sandy-loam or clay-loam, 5.2-7.5pH
- **Weather:** Very cold tolerant, somewhat drought tolerant, needs 15-50 inches of rain
- **Planting:** Plant in late October through early November, 90-120lb/acre
- **Caution:** In mild winters it will head out early. High seed cost. Not tolerant of close grazing.
Wheat

- **Production season:** Dec-April
- **Nutritive Value:** Varies depending on management, generally high quality
- **Soil Preference:** sandy-loam or clay-loam, 5.5-8.0 pH
- **Weather:** 10-66 inches, cold tolerant, less susceptible to freeze damage than oats
- **Planting:** Plant in late October, early November for grazing, 100-200 lb/acre
- **Caution:** Not tolerant of close grazing
Triticale

• **Production season:** December-April
• **Nutritive Value:** High depending on management
• **Soil Preference:** sandy-loam or clay-loam, 5.2-7.2 pH
• **Weather:** Cold tolerant, 15-30 inches rain
• **Planting:** Plant late October to early November, 1-2 bu/acre
• **Caution:** Does not tolerate close grazing, best to use in mixes.
Legumes

- Do not require nitrogen fertilizer and will provide some residual nitrogen for warm season perennial pastures
- Generally require higher soil pH than perennial pastures
- Sensitive to broadleaf herbicides
Berseem Clover

- **Production season:** Feb-Mar
- **Nutritive Value:** Varies with maturity, M-H CP, M-H digestibility, low bloat potential
- **Soil Preference:** Loam, 6.5-8 pH
- **Weather:** Tolerates temporary flooding, will not persist past a hard freeze
- **Planting:** Plant in November, 15-20 lb/acre
Black Medic

- **Production season:** Feb-Mar
- **Nutritive Value:** Varies with maturity, M-H CP, M-H digestibility
- **Soil Preference:** Loam, 5.5-8 pH
- **Weather:** 13-60 inches rain
- **Planting:** Plant in November, 10-12 lb/acre
- **Caution:** Small production window, low production compared to other clovers, limited seed availability and generally not planted commercially as it occurs naturally
Crimson Clover

- **Production season:** Feb-Apr
- **Nutritive Value:** Varies with maturity, M-H CP, M-H digestibility, high yields
- **Soil Preference:** Sandy 5.5-7
- **Weather:** 30-70 inches rain
- **Planting:** Plant in November, 20-25 lb/acre
- **Caution:** Moderate bloat potential
Red Clover

- **Production season:** Mar-Jun
- **Nutritive Value:** Varies with maturity, M-H CP, M-H digestibility
- **Use:** grazing, hay, greenchop
- **Soil Preference:** loam or clay-loam, 6-8 pH
- **Weather:** Very cold tolerant, 35-65 inches of rain
- **Planting:** Plant in November, 10-15lb/acre
- **Caution:** Some bloat potential, not tolerant of close grazing
Sweet Clover

- **Production season:** Feb-May
- **Nutritive Value:** Varies with maturity, M-H CP, M-H digestibility
- **Soil Preference:** sandy-loam or clay-loam, high K and P content, 7-8 pH
- **Weather:** Cold tolerant does not tolerate flooding, 12-65 inches rain
- **Planting:** Plant in November during a rainy period, 12-15lb/acre
- **Caution:** Contains coumarin which can be converted to dicoumarol if baled wet (mold and heat)
Vetch

- **Production season:** Feb-April
- **Nutritive Value:** Varies depending on maturity, generally M-H CP, M-H digestibility
- **Soil Preference:** well drained sandy soils, 5.5-7.5 pH
- **Planting:** Plant in November, 20-35lb/acre depending on species
- **Caution:** Not very productive in Florida, Central Florida may be too warm. Cattle grazing pure stands have developed a dermatitis similar to photosensitization. Expensive.
White Clover

- **Production season:** Mar-Jun
- **Nutritive Value:** Varies depending on maturity, generally M-H CP and digestibility
- **Soil Preference:** not tolerant of sandy soil, pH 6-7.5
- **Weather:** cold tolerant, 40-100 inches of rain
- **Planting:** Plant in November, 3-4 lb/acre
- **Caution:** Not drought tolerant, can delay growth of perennial pastures.
Take Home Message

• Doing nothing is not an acceptable management strategy!
• So much depends on the (darn) weather!
• Don’t neglect to manage grazing!
• When in doubt, ask your livestock agent!