

Soil Sampling

March marks the end for fees on soil samples (\$4.00 fee per sample December through March). Starting April 1, you just pay the postage cost to mail your samples to Raleigh. Soil Sampling is the only way for you to know what nutrients your soil really needs to ensure the best environment for your crop to grow in. There is no need to spend more on fertilizer than is needed and it will cost you in the long run if you are not maximizing your plant growth potential. Contact your local Extension Office for soil sample boxes. Your local agent can also help you read the results and advise you on the best form of fertilizer. Remember to Test, Not Guess!



Hoof Health

Laura Elmore, Livestock Extension Agent, Iredell County

If you are a cattle producer, you will eventually have a cow or bull come up lame. It is only a matter of time. But the underlying problem causing that initial lameness could be difficult to diagnose. Foot and leg problems can occur due to a variety of causes from a poor environment to poor genetics. But how do you determine what is the root of your problem?

Foot rot, heel warts, corns or abscesses all have to same general symptoms so it is important to be able to determine what the problem is before you and your veterinarian can determine an appropriate course of treatment. Is swelling present? Is it general in an entire limb or is it localized to a more specific area? Can you identify any cuts or abrasions? Any foreign material? And finally, is there an odor coming from the area?

Foot rot is a painful, infectious disease in cattle caused by the bacterium *Fusobacterium necrophorum* as well as other bacterial agents. Foot rot has symptoms of swelling and various degrees of lameness. These bacteria cannot penetrate healthy, intact skin, so they invade the space between the toes when the area stays wet or has abrasions from rocks, pasture stubble, or frozen mud and manure. All ages of cattle are susceptible to foot rot but most commonly is seen in cattle of weaning age or older. Upon inspection of the infected hoof you will often times see localized swelling and will observe an unpleasant odor. Cases of foot rot that are diagnosed and treated early will often result in a full recovery.

Abscesses are caused by a hoof sole penetration that leads to an infection under the hoof wall. The hoof is soft and very sensitive, especially in the toe area. The outside front toes are usually the most severely affected with the outside rear toe being the next most common. Wild cattle, abrasive surfaces, and rough handling of the cattle can often combine to create this problem. Early signs of toe abscesses can be soreness and short strides. The foot is not swollen in the early stages. If allowed to progress, the animal will become noticeably lame and eventually swelling may occur at the top of the hoof. There should be no swelling between the toes when there is an abscess. A veterinarian should be consulted to determine a treatment plan. Often times the hoof will be trimmed to relieve the pressure inside the hoof and antibiotics are typically prescribed.

To best minimize any potential problems, it is best to keep both your herd genetics and your pasture environment in mind. Make sure you are selecting bulls and replacement females that have proper feet and leg structure. The conformation of the toes, the depth of the heel, and the structure of your cattle's legs will contribute to their longevity in your herd. In your environment, you should minimize cut or abrasion-causing objects especially around your feeding areas and waterers. Old machinery, gates, and metal should be stored outside of the fence. Concrete or gravel will help prevent mud in areas where cattle usually gather and make sure that lots are well drained.

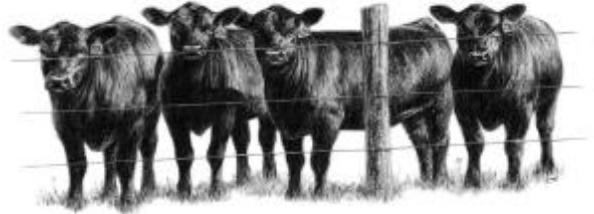
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Extension

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Cattle Call



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Pasture Condition After the Drought

Allison Brown, Agriculture Agent, Alexander County

Did your pastures take a hit after last fall's drought? Many did. If they were thin before they may be really lacking now. However, Fescue is a pretty hardy grass and can bounce back better than most expect with some effort.

First let's consider why your pastures may have been harmed by the drought. A high stocking rate with continual grazing is most likely the culprit that led to the drought affecting your pastures as it did. Pastures that are continually grazed and overgrazed, often do not have a sufficient root system in place to maintain the plant during a drought. If the damage to your pastures is not too severe, they will likely bounce back with some rest and proper fertility this spring.

However, if you feel that your pasture or a section of your pasture is beyond repair, now may be the time to look at planting a summer annual. A summer annual can help you extend your grazing during the summer months when fescue is not growing. Some summer annual options would be pearl millet, sorghum sudangrass, and crabgrass (yes, I am suggesting crabgrass). Not your common crabgrass but new hybrid varieties that have been developed specifically for grazing and have a wider leaf area. If you have been contemplating having a dedicated portion of your pasture planted in annuals now may be the time to act. A target goal of 25% of your pasture acreage planted in annuals will help bridge the grazing gaps in the summer and winter (with a winter annual planted following the summer annual).

Planting and maintaining part of your pasture in annual production may not be for everyone. If your fescue pastures have significant stand reduction and you plan to re-plant fescue, your best chance for success will be to wait till the fall to plant. Traditionally spring plantings do not have high chances for survival during our hot, dry summers. The plants just don't have the root development to make it during periods of stress. The best plan of action would be to plant a summer annual to get you through and then replant your fescue in the fall.



This would also be a good time to take soil samples. Adequate pH and the proper nutrients are vital to ensuring proper plant growth. Having this information early on will allow you enough time to apply the needed nutrients and get your soil fertility where it needs to be.