A N ounce of weed prevention is worth hundreds of pounds of forage. That’s John Will Headen’s philosophy as he plans his pasture weed control program for New Hope Farm near Siler City, N.C. Headen is fortunate to have productive pastures in the green hills of central North Carolina. But along with plentiful grass, the beef producer faces a constant battle to control weeds.

Broadleaf species such as buttercup, thistle, pigweed and yellow crown beard are Headen’s problem weeds. Depending on rainfall, he makes his key weed control application from mid-August to mid-September.

To control broadleaf weeds, Headen includes Grazon P+D (picloram plus 2,4-D) with a liquid nitrogen application. The fertilizer encourages fescue growth for the farm’s fall and winter stockpiled forage, and the herbicide offers broad-spectrum control of broadleaf weeds.

Adding Grazon P+D to his nitrogen application costs $11 to $13 per acre (herbicide only). New Hope Farm’s pastures also receive poultry litter every three to four years to supply slow-release phosphorus and potassium along with nitrogen.

“Late August is an excellent time to apply herbicides if we have rainfall,” says Headen.

For tough-to-control early-season weeds such as buttercup, Headen scouts and sometimes uses an application of 2,4-D in late winter. As the weather warms, he keeps a sharp eye out for young pigweed.

“If I use anything in spring, it’s 2,4-D — which may burn clover, but it comes back,” he says. “Pigweeds drive me crazy in the summer. We hope the August-September herbicide application reduces the number of pigweeds going to seed in our pastures.”

Herbicide applications and mowing are two parts of New Hope Farm’s three-pronged attack on pasture weeds. The third is well-managed rotational grazing.

“Under intensely managed grazing, the cows eat weeds such as horse nettle, which they would otherwise avoid. “People can’t believe cows will eat horse nettle until they see it for themselves,” says Poore, who is continuing his research to see how cows can play a role in weed control.

Headen says in 2011, the three-pronged plan paid off in excellent forage production and a great supply of stockpiled fescue.

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