

Thriving on a mix

By LON TONNESON

BY seeding grasses and clovers into alfalfa to make superior forage for beef cattle, Gary Knutson, Volga, S.D., also reduces his harvesting costs and extends his grazing season.

Knutson usually takes three cuttings from hay fields. But late in the fall, he turns the cows out to graze the hay fields, too.

"The only harvesting cost for the fourth cutting is opening the gate," he says.

He has never had cows bloat while grazing an alfalfa-grass mixture. He makes sure the cows are full of grass hay when he turns them out, and he puts a round bale of drier, coarser hay in the field for them, too.

Knutson has seeded several small paddocks with alfalfa-grass mixtures that cows graze while waiting to be flushed or implanted with an embryo from a donor cow. The paddocks are small enough that he can control thistles and other broad-leaves by spot spraying.

Seeding advice

Knutson offers this advice for selecting alfalfa-grass mixtures:

- Know what grasses and legumes you are mixing together.

- Select plants that are

Key Points

- Interseeding grasses in alfalfa makes superior beef hay.
- Dakota stockman turns out cows to graze fourth cutting.
- Forage mix in small paddocks provides extra energy.

compatible and will help each other grow more vigorously.

- Make sure you have enough grass in an alfalfa-grass mixture. Knutson aims for 15 pounds of grass seed per acre in his mixture.

- Plant early in the spring to increase the chance you'll have enough moisture to establish a good stand.

Knutson aims to have grass-alfalfa mixtures seeded by early to mid-April. If that's not possible, seeding in the fall may



MIXED SPECIES: Gary Knutson holds a sample of the forage mixtures he has in his alfalfa fields. From left to right is alfalfa, wheatgrass and Garrison creeping foxtail.

be better than seeding in late spring because the alfalfa will be growing more slowly.

Right for you?

Forage mixtures aren't right for everybody. Marketing options are limited because dairy producers want pure alfalfa.

Forage mixtures might be a good fit if you regularly feed stock cows more than 5 to 6 pounds of alfalfa per day throughout the winter, says Bruce Anderson, University of Nebraska Extension forage specialist. The cows probably get enough protein, but are short on total digestible nutrients.

Mixes also are a good fit for fields with areas where alfalfa doesn't grow well. It's better to have grass rather than weeds growing in those spots, Anderson says.



BETTER HAY: Gary Knutson interseeded his alfalfa fields with grasses to improve yields, lengthen the stand life and produce hay that better matches his cows' nutritional needs than pure alfalfa.



LUSH FEED: On Gary Knutson's farm, cows awaiting embryo transfers graze paddocks seeded with a mixture of alfalfa and grasses.

N.D. Grasslands Center sets field day

NORTH Dakota State University's Central Grasslands Research Extension Center at Streeter, N.D., will hold its annual field tour June 26.

In addition, the center will host a daylong symposium titled "Natural Resources of the Coteau: Past, Present and Future."

The seminar will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Attendees will learn about the geology of North Dakota's Missouri Coteau region, as well as its history, and cultural and economic development.

The Missouri Coteau region runs diagonally across the state from the northwestern corner through central North Dakota. It's a highland of rock, gravel

Key Points

- Grasslands Center field day will include a special seminar.
- Daylong conference will focus on Coteau ecosystem.
- Coteau region is best suited for producing perennial forages.

and other soil deposited by a receding glacier about 10,000 years ago. Its rolling, grassy hills are dotted with potholes and lakes. While many acres have been converted to cropland, much of the land is highly erodible, making it best suited to producing perennial forages.

"The Coteau is often referred to as the 'Red River Valley of beef production' and has been ranked in the top 10 birding destinations by a national

birding magazine," says center director Paul Nyren. "This symposium will explore the past natural and human history, and the current importance of the region to the ag industry and natural resource tourism."

The field tour will start at 6 p.m. with a welcome from Nyren. The event will include a farm energy audit demonstration, and updates on livestock and biofuels research at the center. NDSU researchers also will report on a study of creep grazing turnips, foxtail millet and an annual species mix.

A community meal in the center's conference room will wrap up the tour at 8:30 p.m.

The NDSU Extension Service's Center for Community Vitality is co-sponsoring the symposium. Speakers, in-

cluding faculty from NDSU, United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck and Minot State University-Bottineau, will provide insights into agriculture and archeology in the Coteau, the Coteau's wildlife, the impact of invasive plant species on its mixed-grass prairie, tourism opportunities in the Coteau, the economic impact of its current and future activities, and the future of natural resources in the region. The symposium will end with a tour of the native grasslands.

The center is four miles north of Streeter.

For more information on the field tour or the center, visit the center's Web site at www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/streeter or contact Nyren at 701-424-3606 or p.nyren@ndsu.edu.



PRIME GRAZING: Cattle graze atop the Missouri Coteau, a region that will be the focus of a daylong symposium and field day June 26.

To learn more about the symposium, contact Kathleen Tweeten, director of the Center for Community Vitality, at 701-328-9718 or kathleen.tweeten@ndsu.edu.