

Adjusting for the Weather

Rain or shine, hot or cold. No matter what the weather, hay and pasture crops must adapt to current conditions to survive. And so must we.

Last week as I was cutting trees out of my pasture fence lines, I found myself thinking about how early pastures and alfalfa were developing this spring. Maybe we should start grazing or need to cut hay earlier than usual. It reminded me that it is really important to recognize weather patterns and adjust our hay and pasture practices to take advantage of good weather as well as protect against bad weather. Fortunately, we have hay and pasture plants that can help us make these adjustments. So let's make good use of them.

Annual forages are good examples of this philosophy. Summer annuals like millets and sudangrass can take advantage of summer rain and reduce drought risk. Similarly, winter small grains grow during the time of the year when we are most likely to receive precipitation. Oats and turnips planted next August in dryland won't grow much if it doesn't rain. But just a few timely showers pay big dividends while risking little when using less expensive seeds.

Relying on annuals alone is risky, though, because some years the weather is not good for establishment. Perennials like alfalfa and most pasture grasses relieve us of this worry. Better still is having both cool-season and warm-season pasture grasses to take advantage of the very different growing conditions we experience in spring, summer, and fall. Having just brome pasture or just summer native pasture is both risky and limits opportunities during some seasons of the year.

Staying ahead of our weather variation is challenging, but with a little thought and some different forages you can do it.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

