

Brome, Brome, and More Brome

Have you noticed the explosion in brome grass growth this spring? What a silly question. How could you miss it. So what happened?

Everywhere I look this spring, from my own pastures near Lincoln, throughout eastern Nebraska and points east, and even in drier areas in central and western Nebraska, smooth brome has thrived. It didn't look too promising in late April and early May before the rains came. Even after it started to rain, cool soil and air temperatures appeared to delay brome growth. But sometime in mid to late May, all the right conditions must have come together because suddenly we went from looking and hoping for more grass growth to looking for calves hidden inside all the tall grass.

As all this grass developed, people started complaining that the cows didn't like the grass. I also noticed that cows on my pastures seemed fussier than usual, wanting to move to a fresh pasture while plenty of brome, both stems and leaves, remained for easy grazing. At first I attributed the cows' attitude simply as a plant maturity, stemminess issue. But then something interesting happened - the cows stopped complaining. And they still seem content even though they are grazing fully-headed, stemmy brome in early July.

What caused this change? Honestly, I don't know. It seemed to coincide with fewer clouds and more sun so I'm guessing that sugars might be involved. During the extremely rapid growth phase, most sugar was used to support plant growth. Afterwards, maybe more sugar produced by more sunlight stayed in plant tissue and made it more palatable. This is just a guess since I have no sugar measurements, but it makes some sense. But I welcome other explanations, especially with data.

Not everything can be explained. But that doesn't keep it from being interesting.

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

