

May 17, 2017

TIME TO PUT NITROGEN ON WARM-SEASON GRASSES

As summer approaches, it soon becomes time to apply fertilizer to warm-season grasses. Where you have moisture, these grasses will begin growing rapidly as soil and air temperature increase. Adding fertilizer now will help these grasses produce extra hay or grazing.

So – how much should you apply? Well, that depends on your own situation. For starters, will you effectively use the extra grass to graze more cattle or increase hay yields? It's surprising how often we apply fertilizer and then waste extra growth by grazing poorly. This may seem obvious, but unless you economically harvest extra growth as hay or with livestock, do not fertilize!

Also consider the ability of your warm-season grass to yield more. Taller warm-season grasses like big bluestem, switchgrass, and Indian grass will give a larger response to fertilizer than will shorter grasses like little bluestem, sideoats grama, or blue grama.

And finally, adjust fertilizer for moisture conditions. In eastern Nebraska, 50 to 60 pounds of nitrogen per acre works well for average or better moisture conditions. In central and western Nebraska only subirrigated meadows normally have enough growth potential to respond to added nitrogen; there about 40 pounds per acre will do. Check your moisture conditions, though, before investing in fertilizer nitrogen. Many of these fields also need a little phosphorus so follow soil test recommendations for its amount.

If you can benefit from extra growth on your warm-season grasses, fertilize now, in late May, for higher yields. Then graze or cut hay on a timely basis for profitable returns.

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