

New UNL Beef Newsletter "UNL BeefWatch" Now Available Online at <http://newsroom.unl.edu/announce/beef/1922>

Evaluate Drought-Stressed Cool Season Pastures This Spring

Source: Steve Tonn, UNL Livestock Educator

Summer 2012 brought us the most extreme drought conditions in recent memory, and many of our pastures are still in poor condition. Evaluating their condition is important, and early April is a good time to take a close look.

All pasture evaluation methods are subjective and their usefulness depends on the judgment of the evaluator. The best evaluator is the pasture manager. The manager of the pasture has the best sense of 1) a particular pasture's conditions compared to normal, 2) what has changed due to the extended drought, and 3) what issues can be addressed immediately.

Dr. Stephen Barnhart, Iowa State University Extension Forage Agronomist, suggests that for the best estimate of plant recovery and vigor, wait until 2 to 3 inches of spring regrowth is visible. Then walk through your pastures and consider:

- Have there been any changes in plant species since the last season?
- Has pasture density decreased since last season?
- Is there evidence that weeds will be more of a problem?
- Is there active erosion or localized damage due to supplemental hay feeding?

Pastures with little or no drought damage should have an 80% or greater stand density, or sod cover. These pastures should recover with good growing conditions. Even if new growth appears "normal", your pasture plants have suffered some drought and use stress. They may require deferred grazing for a couple weeks longer than usual for complete recovery.

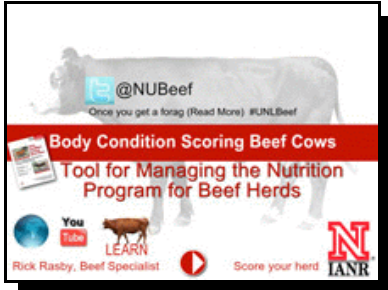
Pastures with greater drought damage may have some stand loss, with less than 80 percent sod cover. These pastures will benefit from deferred spring grazing and early spring fertilization. Interseeding legumes may also be an option to thicken up the stand. Even with deferred grazing, fertilization, overseeding and weed management, these pastures may require good growing conditions and two to three months of careful grazing management for complete recovery.

Severely damaged stands, with less than 40 percent sod cover, are going to require good growing conditions, weed management, aggressive overseeding efforts (or even complete renovation), and patience for adequate recovery opportunities.

March snows have provided some moisture for our cool season grass pastures to start growing. But don't let that first growth fool you. Below ground, many plants are still suffering from last year's drought.

Delay turn out a couple of weeks so plants develop enough leaf area to begin repairing injured roots. Also reduce stocking rates by 20 percent on improved pastures to account for weakened root systems. Don't risk long-term pasture injury for short-term feed gains. Manage grazing to help pastures recover from last year's stress.





Body Condition Scoring App: NUBeef.BCS

The body condition score of your cow herd is a much better indicator of the effectiveness of the nutrition program than body weight of the cows or average weight of the cow herd.

More details at: <http://go.unl.edu/5jn>

Control Musk Thistle In Spring

Finally it's spring! At least that's what the calendar says. Noxious weeds are still dormant for the most part, except for the persistent musk thistle.

Musk thistle, classified as a biennial, is already springing up in the rosette stage. Rosettes range in size from quite small (a few inches) to three feet in diameter. They hug the ground and can be difficult to see until they're under foot.



The larger rosettes are usually the seedlings that germinated last fall and over-wintered as a rosette. As a biennial, this second year growth will produce flowers and seeds during this season. As the seeds germinate, the process begins again.

Musk thistle reproduces only by seed; however a single musk thistle plant can produce thousands of seeds, which can lie dormant in the soil for years. Plants that are chopped and left in the field may have enough energy to produce viable seed, so proper disposal of the seed head is important.

Large infestations of musk thistle may require herbicide control. Musk thistle plants are quite easy to control with herbicides when treated in the rosette stage of growth. Herbicides should be applied in the spring before the flower stalks begin to form and elongate. Repeated applications may be necessary to eliminate the musk thistle infestation.

The UNL Extension EC-130, Guide for Weed Management, has products recommended for the control of musk thistle. Always read and follow the label of every product you use, as the label is the law.

Sericea Lespedeza Newest Noxious Weed Effective April 1, 2013

“This weed poses a threat to our native ranges and pastureland as well as other natural areas,” said Greg Ibach, Nebraska Department of Agriculture Director. “It can reduce or even eliminate native grasses, and it affects the quality and quantity of pasture available to our livestock herds.”

Sericea lespedeza is a perennial that grows well in grasslands and pastures as well as along roadsides and drainage areas. The weed currently is found mainly in southeast Nebraska and can be spread by wildlife and livestock. Infested areas that are utilized for hay production accelerate the spread of the weed into new areas.

The plant grows from 2 to 7 feet tall and can be identified by its alternate leaves that are pinnately trifoliolate. Lower leaf surfaces tend to have short hairs. Stems are straight, slender, and grooved and can have short hairs. Flowers, which bloom in late summer, range in color from

white to cream to light yellow.

First identified in Nebraska in Richardson County in 1974, it has now spread to 3,000 acres in Nebraska, said Mitch Coffin, NDA Noxious Weed Program Manager. In Kansas 500,000 acres are affected, he said.

In addition to sericea lespedeza, Nebraska has 11 noxious weeds:



If you have questions about controlling any of Nebraska's noxious weeds, contact a county weed control superintendent or the NDA Noxious Weed Program Manager at (402) 471-6844.