PINCHING PENNIES THIS YEAR? CONSIDER AN N-RICH STRIP.

Dr. Jeff Edwards, Extension Small Grains

Farmers across the country are looking for ways to trim the fat from their operations, and justifiably so. The key is knowing how to trim the fat without cutting into muscle, and this cannot be accomplished without a clear distinction of where the fat ends. Determining this optimal point is difficult in agriculture, but luckily we have tools, such as sensor-based nitrogen recommendations, that can help us to determine where the fat ends and muscle begins.

If you have been to a county extension meeting within the past two years, it is likely that you have been introduced to the concept of sensor-based nitrogen recommendations (a.k.a. Greenseeker or N-Rich Strips). Simply put, this system uses a hand-held sensor to compare plant health and plant size between an area where nitrogen is not limiting (i.e. an N-rich strip) and an area that represents normal farmer practice. The first step in this process is to create an N-rich strip. The following are a few frequently asked questions regarding N-rich strips:

How do I create an N-rich strip?
In the simplest terms, an N-rich strip is an area where Nitrogen is not limiting. This can usually be accomplished by applying 2.5 – 3 lbs/ac of nitrogen for every bushel of wheat yield goal. For example, a producer with a 40 bu/ac yield goal would apply around 100 – 120 lb/ac in an N-rich strip.

How big does my N-rich strip have to be?
There is no one-size-fits-all answer to this question. The N-rich strip needs to be in a representative area of the field and large enough to accurately reflect the variability in crop growth in the field. So, a very uniform field would only require a small N-rich strip (maybe 30' wide by 100' long), but for most producers a longer strip will be better.

When to I create my N-rich strip?
In a perfect world, all N-rich strips would be created pre-plant or soon after emergence. However, N-rich strips created as late as the end of December can still be effective. The take-home message is the earlier the better.

Do I need an N-rich strip in every field?
YES!

I graze my wheat, how does that change things?
Yes. Based on some of our experiences last year, we have concluded that N-rich strips in a grazing system may require more nitrogen than in a grain-only system. This is likely because forage production and preferential grazing by cattle removes more N from the soil profile. In this situation, we can wind up with strips that are no longer truly N-rich. We are conducting research to find easier ways of using sensor-based recommendations in a dual-purpose system, but the best recommendation right now is to create your N-rich strip as normal and monitor it throughout the year. If the N-rich strip starts to look N-deficient, then a supplemental N application may be necessary.

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SIGNUP FOR LIVESTOCK ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM WILL BE THURSDAY

The Block Grant program for livestock producers that was announced a little more than a month ago by USDA Secretary Mike Johanns is moving forward here in Oklahoma, as State Secretary of Ag Terry Peach announced to the media yesterday morning that signup for the monies made available to Oklahoma begins tomorrow, Thursday, and will continue until the close of business on November 20th.

This is a closed program in that there are only so many dollars to go around, so they won't know how much an animal unit will be paid with this program until after signup ends, the spreadsheet is tallied and we know how many animal units have to be applied against the six and half million dollars.

Anyone who owned eligible livestock as of March 7, 2006 can apply. Eligible livestock include cattle, sheep, goats, bison and commercial elk and deer. The maximum that any one producer could receive is $10,000, but that's almost laughable when you consider that we likely will have close to five million animal units that could sign up for the program, based on recent USDA livestock inventory reports. Our best guess is that if you have a ninety percent signup of eligible animals-you might see the amount each animal unit getting up to around $1.40. A mature beef cow is one animal unit. So if you have 100 mama cows, a couple of bulls, several calves and a horse to work the cattle, you might have as much as 150 animal units times that value assigned per animal unit. Let's take a middle of the road value for the animal unit of say $1.25, which means that operator with 150 animal units would get about $187, not a lot, but it could buy a little hay to help as you figure out how you will feed those critters you have left this winter.

Two Beaver County Meetings will be held Thursday, October 5th at 1:00 pm and repeated at 6:00 pm. Both will be held at the Beaver County Fairgrounds in the Commercial Building. David Jett, ODAFF will be providing insight on completing the form.

Forms are available at the County Extension Office or the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture website- http://www.oda.state.ok.us/

MOST U.S. CONSUMERS PREFER DOMESTIC CORN-FED STEAKS OVER AUSTRALIAN GRASS-FED

In order to compare consumer acceptance of U.S. domestic corn-fed, Canadian barley-fed, and Australian grass-fed beef, Univ. of Nebraska scientists conducted 24 taste panels (273 consumers) in Denver and Chicago. Strip steaks were evaluated for flavor, juiciness, tenderness, and overall acceptability on an 8-point scale (1=extremely undesirable; 8=extremely desirable). A silent auction was used to obtain sealed bids on steaks from the same strip loins sampled in the taste panel.

Domestic steaks were given significantly higher ($P<0.001$) scores for all four palatability characteristics than Australian grass-fed steaks.

Consumers placed an average value of $3.68/lb on domestic steaks compared to $2.48/lb on Australian grass-fed steaks ($P<0.001$).

Consumers scored Canadian steaks numerically lower for juiciness ($P=0.09$) and significantly lower ($P<0.005$) for flavor, tenderness, and overall acceptability than domestic steaks.

Consumers placed an average value of $3.95/lb for domestic steaks compared to $3.57/lb for Canadian steaks ($P<0.01$).

In contrast to the majority of consumers surveyed, 19% preferred Australian grass-fed steaks, and 29% favored Canadian steaks.

The authors hypothesized that because a steady supply of corn-fed beef is available to most consumers in the U.S., Americans may have become accustomed to the flavor of corn-fed beef and therefore prefer it. They went on to say, however, that because a small proportion of American consumers preferred the imported products and was willing to pay more for them, a niche market for them may be feasible in the U.S. (Sitz et al. 2005. J. Anim. Sci. 83:2863).

Source: Dr. Rick Rasby, Professor of Animal Science Animal Science, University of Nebraska - Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

ADD COLORFUL SHRUBS TO YOUR LANDSCAPE

When you say "shrub," most folks probably picture "green"—but shrubs actually can bring a whole rainbow of colors to your yard. Planting shrubs will add substance and form to your landscaping because they are generally larger than annual and perennial flowers, and they can provide color in a number of ways:

- Blossoms—Flowering shrubs start delivering early in spring with the forsythia's golden bloom. For later spring and summer flowers, you have a wide range of colors to consider—from white mock orange and summer sweet to pink spirea and purple smokebush. Lilacs alone can be white, lavender, purple, or blue. Butterfly bush and spirea can continue blooming right into fall.

- Colored foliage—Flowers aren't the only way shrubs can add color to your yard. Many have colored leaves. Consider barberry, purpleleaf sand cherry, or purple smokebush for rich purple foliage. A number of false cypress, junipers, and arborvitae have golden-hued foliage that contrasts beautifully with darker green conifers. A blue spruce like the popular 'Fat Albert' makes a beautiful specimen planted in front of the house or contrasted with other evergreens.

- Variegated foliage—Variegated forms of dogwood, mock orange, weigela and other shrubs have green leaves striped or speckled with white or yellow. These are especially effective when planted where they will be seen up close.

- Fall color—Trees aren't the only deciduous plants with leaves that flame into yellow, gold, and red in the fall. Many shrubs will light up your yard with blazing color. Consider these:

burning bush, sumac, cotoneaster, oakleaf hydrangea, Flaming Globe spirea, or viburnum.

- Winter color—Some shrubs go beyond providing colorful foliage and flowers by maintaining other colorful features through the winter months. The branches of red-osier dogwood and yellow-stemmed dogwood stand out long after they lose their leaves. Other shrubs—including cotoneaster, pyracantha, viburnum, chokeberry, and holly—have red, orange, purple, or black berries that will keep some color in your garden during the off-season.

Whichever shrubs you choose for color, fall is an excellent time to plant them. Just remember to make the planting hole big enough (roughly twice the width of the shrub's root ball), mix organic matter with the native soil for filling in the hole, and water deeply.

Push slow release fertilizer spikes into the soil, per the package directions, to encourage good root growth. With a little care in choosing, planting, and maintaining them, your shrubs will continue to add color to your yard year after year!

PREPARE GERANIUMS FOR INDOORS

If you plan to overwinter geraniums indoors, prepare them now. Cut back leggy plants so they will be easier to dig and transplant into containers before the first fall frost. If you're short on time and space, take some cuttings for new geranium plants and don't save the ones in the garden. Find a place indoors with bright light and cool temperatures.

PLANT PEONIES

Fall sales offer discounted prices on herbaceous and tree peonies. Plant them in full sun where the soil has been enriched with organic compost and sphagnum peat moss. Don't plant too deeply or they may fail to bloom.

JOHNE'S DISEASE, NOT JUST FOR MILK COWS ANYMORE

For many years Johne's (pronounced "YO-NEES") Disease has been recognized as a significant problem in dairies throughout the Midwest, across the United States , and around the world. Over the last decade scientists and veterinarians in Oklahoma have become increasingly aware of this problem as an emerging disease in beef cows. Most beef producers have either never heard of it or may be familiar with the name only. Is it a significant problem? Consider that there is no treatment, it is almost impossible to eradicate, the number of infected herds is growing, and it can spread in your herd for years before showing up as a clinical disease.

Nobody seems to know the incidence rate of Johne's in Oklahoma beef herds, but the diagnostic lab at Stillwater reports that it is not uncommon. It has been more prevalent in dairies because of more intensive management and more animals on fewer acres. Many of today's more intensive grazing programs such as rotational grazing, and the extensive use of cultivated grass pastures such as Bermuda and fescue that incorporate higher stocking densities may be contributing to the increasing occurrence of the disease. Seed-stock operations where calves are raised in more closely managed, confined situations are certainly at risk. Cattle operations (such as stockers and feedlots) may not see signs of the disease, even though some of the cattle were infected as babies. If however, the infected stocker heifer is kept as a replacement, she may have clinical signs of Johne's disease when she reaches adulthood.

The causative agent, *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis* , almost always enters your herd when you unknowingly purchase a carrier animal. Animals are infected early in life by eating or drinking fecal contamination, nursing dirty udders, or getting the organism by shedding from their mother in the milk and especially in the colostrum. The disease has a long incubation period and the organism is not usually found until at least 1 ½ to 2 years of age.

Even then it usually lies dormant in the cows system for years while she appears normal but is infecting her calves and serving as a low level carrier for other susceptible animals in the herd. The infection may never cause clinical disease or it may at some point in the animal's adult life wake up and cause a clinical problem. Clinically the disease is manifested as a steadily worsening diarrhea and chronic weight loss that eventually becomes debilitating emaciation. There is no treatment and all of the clinically sick animals eventually die from loss of fluids and electrolytes from the intestinal tract. These sick animals are super carriers, shedding large numbers of bacteria into the environment to introduce infections that may not show up for years in other animals.

Many times Johne's Disease is diagnosed at the slaughter house when meat inspectors see the lesions in the gut and stain microscopic sections to find the organisms. Tests for living animals include a test performed on blood serum and culture of the feces to find the organism. The serum test is not perfect, but it is relatively quick and easy and makes a good screening test. Fecal culture takes longer and costs more but is definitive for confirming the disease. Because the disease takes so long to develop, the Oklahoma Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory doesn't recommend testing animals under 1 ½ years of age.

Johne's Disease is a serious concern for cow calf operators. Producers who are purchasing replacements need to know that they are not buying the problem. Likewise, producers offering bulls and replacement heifers need to be able to assure prospective buyers that they are free of the problem. To this end, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry has started a voluntary Oklahoma Johne's Disease Surveillance and Education program. This is a strictly voluntary program, but for producers willing to work with their veterinarian to ensure they have clean herds, they will subsidize the costs of evaluation and laboratory testing. To learn more about this program contact your local veterinarian who in turn can contact the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, Animal Industry Division.

Source: Dave Sparks, DVM , OSU Area Extension Food-Animal Quality and Health Specialist

The Certified Angus Beef folks are saying enough is enough when it comes to bigger and bigger beef carcasses. They say that since carcasses in recent years have gotten bigger and bigger- primal cuts like the ribeye have gotten harder to cut for steaks, sometimes leading to a lack of uniformity in the product. So, they will not certify any carcass larger than 1000 pounds and have parameters set for the size of the ribeyes they will certify. Their President, Jim Riemann, says "When the overall industry changes and production signals run counter to what our customers want, it is incumbent upon us to act."