

Extension Cattle Call

Stanly County Livestock Market- Norwood

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What Does Your Soil Report Say?

Allison Brown, Livestock Agent, Alexander County

If your answer is “I don’t have a soil report”, then you need to get one now. Soil testing has just entered the free sample analysis time period (generally April through November) so there is currently no charge for soil reports and the ground is still soft. Now is the time to get those done!

Soil tests are important and can save you money. For example, a local producer purchased a small farm a couple years ago. The land had not been managed well for many years and he knew it would need some attention. Obviously poultry litter was the first option due to convenience and providing quick nutrient sources that could be quickly utilized by the soil. 6 months after application of poultry litter he took soil samples. Of course this is not the ideal order of events but we all know how farming works sometimes. After receiving the results, he was shocked to learn that in some areas his Phosphorus levels were 6 times higher than the optimum level (P-Index 50 ppm) needed to produce optimum forage yields.

So here is the lesson. If he had completed a soil test first, he would have only needed to apply nitrogen and not a complete fertilizer or poultry litter in this case. Only applying a nitrogen source would have saved him money, added to his bottom line and be a step in the right direction to improving the health of the soil. Many times farmers apply complete fertilizers (ex: 10-10-10) when they are not needed and then end up not applying enough nitrogen to achieve forage yield goals. Very often if you apply fertilizer to meet your soils Phosphorus or Potassium needs, you’re shorting yourself on Nitrogen. Nitrogen recommendations for forages are 120-200 lbs/acre for a complete year. Obviously you would not apply all of that at one time but use split applications to meet your forage growth needs. For cool season grasses that would be in the spring and fall.

For specific recommendations, soil sample supplies or help interpreting your soil report, contact your local Extension Agent for help.

Ranges for most row crops and forages

Soil Test Level	Expected Yield Potential	P	K
Very Low	<65%	<16	<61
Low	65-85%	16-25	61-90
Medium	85-95%	26-35	91-130
Optimum	100%	36-50	131-175
Above Optimum (High)	100%	>50	>175



Summer Annuals for Grazing



Annual forages can offer great benefits to beef cattle operations. Both cool and warm season annual forages can fill in those gaps in your permanent grazing system. Warm season annuals particularly, will perform well in the summer months when fescue does not. Start with a small field that you can easily rotate your cattle on and off. Then consider planting a winter annual in the fall! This will not only increase your grazing days but also increase animal performance.

In North Carolina, cool-season grasses produce ample forage in the spring and fall, but high temperatures and short-term drought stress often limit growth during the summer months. Therefore, there is a need for additional grazing, hay or green-chop during July and August. Summer annual grasses can fill this gap with relatively high quality forage when properly managed. Advantages to using summer annual grasses include fast germination and emergence, rapid growth, high productivity, and flexibility of utilization. Warm-season grasses can be grazed as needed and excess growth can be harvested as hay or silage.

Summer annual grasses that can be grown in North Carolina include sudangrass (*Sorghum bicolor*), forage sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), sorghum x sudangrass hybrids, pearl millet (*Pennisetum americanum*), foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*), and crabgrass (*Digitaria* species). There are some new BMR (brown mid-rib) sorghum/sudan varieties available that offer high quality due to the reduced lignon in the plant. Lignon reduces the digestibility of the plant thereby reducing the nutritional value. Thus BMR forage has higher feed value and forage palatability for livestock offering higher daily gains on stockers in a Texas A&M study.

Planting crabgrass may sound odd but it is quickly gaining in popularity. It is a survivor during those hot summer months and cattle love it. It is a serious contender for summer annual grazing!

Livestock Market Comments

Dr. Andrew P. Griffith, Ag Economist for the University of Tennessee

Steer prices were \$2 to \$5 lower this week compared to last week based on Tennessee weekly auction market data while heifer prices were \$2 to \$9 lower compared to a week ago. The calf and feeder cattle markets are really beginning to be muddled between a softening finished cattle market and grass fever purchases. This has resulted in a very unsettled market with uncertainty among many in the industry. As is normal, beef cattle industry participants are trying to process many pieces of information. As the information is gathered, industry participants use that information to make decisions which impacts prices of calves and feeder cattle. The piece of information that has been on the list for a long time is the number of cattle placed on feed in the past five or six months. Though this piece of information is not new, it continues to be a major factor in decision making as many in the industry expect a wall of cattle to be harvested in the next few months and thus a wall of beef and beef products to be marketed. Another factor that has been in play is the drought conditions that have dominated most of the Southern Plains and Southwest United States for the better part of four or five months which impacted wheat pasture placements and could potentially influence spring and summer marketings at the calf and feeder cattle level. Still, another factor is international beef trade from a retaliatory tariff standpoint and restructuring trade agreements with major beef export markets. All of the stated factors plus many more weigh in the decision making process of those in the industry. Supply and demand ultimately determine cattle and beef prices, but participants' expectations of future supply and demand influence the current price. Sometimes these participants have a bullish outlook on the market which drives prices higher. At other times, these participants have a bearish outlook which pushes the market lower. It appears there is more bearish information in the market given softening prices.