

Extension Cattle Call

Stanly County Livestock Market- Norwood

August 2018

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What Type of Fertilizer Does Your Land Need?

Allison Brown, Livestock Agent, Alexander County

How do you know when you should use organic/ natural fertilizers like poultry litter or synthetic fertilizers like ammonium nitrate, urea or a blend like 17-17-17 to fertilize your pastures?

Well, availability is usually the first reason a producer chooses one source of fertilizer over the other. Most poultry producers also have cattle and choose to use the litter from the chicken houses to fertilize their pastures. This is a viable option but may not be able to sustain itself year after year. Why not? Well poultry litter doesn't just contain nitrogen it also contains phosphorus and potassium. Actually a lot more phosphorus and potassium than nitrogen when compared to what your crop needs. To produce 3.5 tons of fescue/acre/year, you would need to apply on average 135 lbs of nitrogen/year and that same crop would need to use 65 pounds/acre/ year of phosphorus. Broiler litter can average around 60-60-50 of N-P-K (other types of litter contain less nitrogen).

Soil Samples are the only sure fire way to know what your fields need. And litter samples are the best way to know what nutrients you have available to apply. If you apply poultry litter based on your nitrogen rate goals you will over apply phosphorus and potassium. Plants only use so much phosphorus during their growth cycle and the excess phosphorus just sits there in the soil. Excess phosphorus in the soil can prevent plants from taking up needed minerals for growth resulting in poor stands and increased weed growth.

If your P-Index (phosphorus level) is high you don't need to apply a complete fertilizer or poultry litter. You will be adding nutrients that your soil doesn't need. However you do still need nitrogen for adequate plant growth for grazing or hay production. In this situation an application of nitrogen only, like ammonium nitrate or urea, would be the best option. Producers could then apply their poultry litter to other fields that required a complete fertilizer or sell it.

Poultry litter is a great source of fertilizer and can really improve neglected or nutrient poor soils. A blended commercial fertilizer is needed if you don't have access to poultry litter and your soils require nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Fertilizers can be custom blended to meet your soil needs. 17-17-17 or 10-10-10 may not meet your soil requirements and stay within your fertilizer budget. Once again this is when a free soil sample really pays off!

Don't apply nutrients that you don't need. Those that have poultry litter say it's free and doesn't cost anything. However, it is costing you if you don't need all of the nutrients that it contains..... in plant productivity and grass tonnage produced for either grazing or hay production. High phosphorus levels in soils can take years to reduce.

Cattle Market Bit

Andrew P. Griffith, Agriculture Economist, University Of Tennessee Extension

No one knows for sure which way the market will move going forward, but the expectation is for lower prices to consume the market due to increased production. One aspect of the market that has appeared to slow down is the purchase of open heifers for beef cow replacement. There have been several feeder cattle sales in which the auction price made it seem apparent that the heifers were destined to be bred because they were valued tremendously higher than same weight feeder heifers. However, many of the high quality open heifers in today's market are only bringing a moderate premium compared to average quality heifers destined for the feedlot.

Foothills Forage Tour

Join us for the Foothills Forage Tour on Tuesday, August 28th beginning at 6:00 pm. The tour will be held in Caldwell County we will be touring Ronnie Holman's farm. Ronnie has actively served on the NC Forage & Grasslands Council and is a progressive cattlemen. If you would like more details or would like to attend, please contact your local Extension Agent to register. The event is free, we just want to know you're coming!

Weed of the Month

Nathan Kiger, Livestock Agent, Cabarrus County

Johnsongrass (sorghum halepense) is a perennial, warm season grass that can grow up to 6 ½ ft tall and be grazed by cattle, although it is normally eliminated within a few years from continuous grazing. During times of drought, frost, trampling, or second growth, johnsongrass can develop prussic acid (cyanide) in new growth and cause issues for livestock. Heavy nitrogen application can also lead to nitrate poisoning if the plants are drought stricken. In hay that contains johnsongrass, prussic acid levels will deteriorate but nitrates can still pose a risk and can affect animals rapidly. If you feel there may be concern, conduct a forage test before feeding. Johnsongrass can be controlled with a weed wiper or spot spraying glyphosate or by the use of Outrider, Pastora, Prowl H₂O, or Panoramic/Impose in cool season grasses such as fescue. However, some stunting or injury may occur to these cool season grasses, so be sure to read the label for these products thoroughly before application.

