

The AMPAC Impact

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Do you know what I dreaded most about this time of the year growing up? Back-to-school ads!!! That meant one thing: the new school year was only a few weeks away. With those days behind me, do you know what I now dread the most about this time of the year? The constant speculation of the harvest! Two months ago, I along with many others, would have told you that our crop looks “okay”. Yes, we had a reduction of perennial ryegrass acres but otherwise most things looked good.

What do you get when you take an “okay” looking crop, high European inventories, and add high grower prices?... A lot of nervous seed companies. Yes, AMPAC was right there with the rest of the nervous bunch. Well... as the old saying goes, time sure does have a way of healing, or in this case, changing things. It appears a few 100+ degree days can do a lot to a grass plant trying to set seed. At Ampac we like to say, “you don’t know what you have until it’s in the bag”. Is that ever true this year.



Harvest 2006

Here's our 2006 harvest report:

Annual Ryegrass Yields are average to above average. The market has softened, but stay tuned to the weather channel. If we get rain in the south and southeast, I think we’ll see very strong sales. High prices on other cool season grasses along with strong sales could firm this market back up.

Orchardgrass Good yields but on fewer acres keeps this market firm. Rumor has it there won’t be a lot of European production coming into the US market this year. Look for the market to remain firm as Valley producers continue taking out old fields of orchardgrass. Yes, even at these “high” prices.

Tall Fescue Fawn yields are good but a less than average. The Kentucky 31 and turf type crop have pushed prices up. With average to less than average turf type fescue yields and no inventory carryover, the market has firmed up. The market should stay firm for the rest of the year.

Fine Fescue Canadian creeper started firming up last spring and with an extremely poor crop of creeping red fescue in Oregon, the proprietary CRF market will firm up and stay there. Chewings, sheep and hard fescue will increase in price due to poor yields and not enough acres; producing a short supply. I see the industry running out of hard and sheep fescue before next harvest.

Perennial Ryegrass The true market price of perennial ryegrass is still up in the air as the PRBA (Perennial Ryegrass Bargaining Association) and seed companies have yet to establish a final price. However, with around 12% fewer acres and with yields of only 80% of normal... we are missing a few million pounds of seed. I expect the industry to be short of perennial ryegrass this year.

Other Crops Kentucky Bluegrass yields are not coming in as good as expected and this market should firm up. Clover acres are up and the crop looks okay. This market is soft.

Alfalfa inventories are low and you can expect the market on proprietary varieties to be firm.

For more up to date information contact your AMPAC sales representative.



Some days I just wonder...I wonder what life would be like outside of agriculture...I read an article in the Indianapolis Star on July 30th about how farmers in SE IN were struggling whether to sell their farm for “zoned-commercial” value or to keep on farming. Honda just purchased 1,500 acres near Greensburg, IN and paid well-above the “agriculture-zoned” price to get the land. But many farmers were perplexed about whether to sell or not because of their ties to their farms. Some farms had been in the family for generations, so the idea of selling was heart-wrenching! For those who lived in town off their farm ground the decision seemed easy; sell the farm and buy another one. But there is just something about the farm; Dad’s farm, or Granddad’s farm, that makes that “old piece of dirt,” or old barn special. I realize that emotion each time I drive by Grandma’s and Granddad’s place in southern Indiana along Hwy 62... across from the John Deere store where we got cold pop on a hot day and sat on tractors and dreamed of having a new tractor someday...The family has not owned the property since Grandma passed away in 1983; but in my mind, that is still “our farm”.

I now farm in my memories. I seem to do a better job of farming that way! It’s easier to make sound farming decisions in my imagination...and that’s why I try to stay grounded by visiting farms as much as possible to keep my ear to the ground as I make recommendations to real-life farmers whose lives depend on the soil and crops they are responsible for. Thus, I like to pass on credible information like Dr. Undersander’s article on fall seeding dates and how they affect the next year’s yield. I want to make sure to pass along information that helps those who decided to stay and not sell. To those who stay on the farm...my hat’s off to you! For those who sold...I understand your decision... I might have made the same one you did if I had the opportunity.

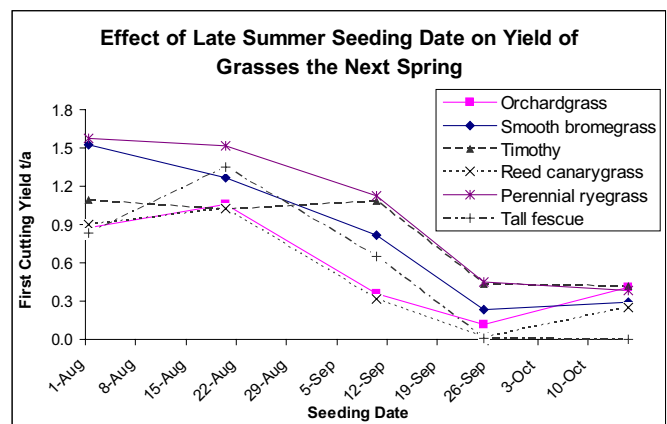
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Fall seeding grasses

Dr. Dan Undersander
Forage Agronomist

Late-summer/fall establishment of grass is often desired in the Midwest. Most farmers do not realize how much fall seeding date affects the yield of the grasses the next year. We seeded six forage grasses at several late summer dates at three sites in Wisconsin (River Falls, Arlington, and Lancaster) over three years. Seeding dates were spaced approximately every 2 to 3 weeks from late about August 1 to late November 1. Species included orchardgrass, smooth brome grass, timothy, reed canarygrass, perennial ryegrass, and tall fescue.



All of the grasses seeded by mid- to late-September produced stands with visible plants before we had a killing frost most years and these plants usually survived the winter. Later seedings did not produce visible plants until spring, if at all. Slow establishing species, particularly reed canarygrass, produced better stands when seeded by September. Timothy tended to be the most variable with regard to seeding date and next year yield. In only one trial out of nine did a November seeding, where the seed lay dormant over winter, produce a stand the next spring.

The most important finding is that earlier seeding dates (early through mid August) usually had more tillers per square foot, more tillers per plant, and higher dry matter yield the following season. As shown, in the figure, average first cutting yields of grasses the spring after late summer seeding, when harvested at the boot stage, ranged from 1.5 t/a for some grasses down to less than 0.5 t/a on first cutting depending on when they were sown the previous fall. By later cuttings the stands had recovered and all yielded well. However, delaying late summer seeding from mid August to mid September generally resulted in 1 ton/acre less yield the next year.

This study clearly shows that delaying grass seeding in the late summer or early fall not only increases the risk of establishment failure but reduces yield of the stand the next year. Therefore we recommend seeding grasses as early as possible during the month of August.

Fertility 101, N-P-K, and a little bit more...

By Jeff Medlin

As I've traveled around the southeast these last few months I have had the opportunity to visit with producers who have had questions concerning fertilizer requirements. Most everyone is familiar with N-P-K, but I have to ask if they really understand the importance of each and what benefits they provide. The proper use of fertilizer not only produces a healthier, and more "eye appealing" crop, but it can also help control or minimize potential problems that might occur. Never "guess" at what nutrients are available or are required. Soil testing is a vital part of the successful producers programs, and then following that guideline is critical to crop (turf or forages) success.

Let's break it down briefly:

Nitrogen (N) is the most frequently used nutrient. It promotes growth and density, as well as deep green color. A good fertilizer should supply enough nitrogen to give a good initial green up, but also help maintain the plants vigor at maximum levels. I realize that Nitrogen prices have sky-rocketed this year due to high pricing of natural gas, but the good news is that these prices appear to be falling a bit. Natural gas was affected severely by last years hurricane Katrina damaged the pipeline infrastructure in the gulf. Fortunately, we now have built up our reserves again on natural gas, so the pricing should begin to decline.

Phosphorus (P) is extremely important during the early stages of seedling development. Tillering and rhizome development is very slow when phosphorus levels are below acceptable levels. While phosphorus is very immobile in the soil, it is not always readily available. Most subsoils east of the Mississippi are deficient in available phosphorus. When seeding in the fall, phosphorus deficient soils will hinder plant vigor due to poor development of root systems.

Potassium (K) helps to contribute to the vitality and hardiness to a plant and is considered a key to the prevention of disease and a prime factor in plant stress condition such as cold and hot weather tolerance, and

wear tolerance from traffic. Potassium deficiencies are noticeable in the leaves of the plant, which may be streaked with yellow, brown at the tips, and eventually die. Many crops become more susceptible to disease and winter injury when potassium levels are low.

A lot of producers will stop at this point thinking that "as long as I've put out a little N-P-K, everything will be okay. While this might work some of the time, the only sure way is to perform adequate soil testing and then following through with the plan that is developed. Secondary elements like Calcium (Ca) (which give the plant its strength by helping in the development of new cells), Magnesium (Mg) (which is vital for photosynthesis and limiting winter injury) and Sulfur (S) (which with nitrogen helps make new protoplasm for new cells), are really not secondary at all, they are just as important as the Macro Nutrients but just not needed in the same quantities.

Minor elements include; Manganese (Mn) (activates enzymes involved in photosynthesis), Iron (Fe) (which helps produce chlorophyll and enzymes), Copper (Cu) (which like Iron, is important to chlorophyll and enzyme production), Boron (B) (which is needed for carbohydrate metabolism and sugar movement), Molybdenum (Mo) (which helps control high concentrations of nitrates in the plant), Zinc (Zn) (which helps regulate chlorophyll production and sugar consumption) and Chlorine (Cl) (which aids in photosynthesis). Each of these elements is vital to plant production. Any deficiencies will weaken the plant.

Soil types and soil requirements vary from state to state, county to county, neighbor to neighbor, and even field to field. There is no magic formula for any particular crop. Fertility requirements for plant species will add expense to your production, but will help increase yield. Nutrient availability is directly influenced by the pH of the soil. Ideal soil conditions are few and far between in the southeast, but can be modified (through time and effort) to help produce more available forage, or a stronger turf.