Getting Spring Pastures off to the Right Start
Eileen A. Coite, REINS Coordinating Agent

Spring is coming, and I know everyone is excited about getting their pastures off to a good beginning for the growing season! There are a few things to keep in mind to ensure your horse pasture starts off right and leads into a productive spring and summer. Below I’ve listed some of these to help you achieve and maintain a productive, healthy pasture this year.

First of all, if a soil sample has not been taken in the past 2-3 years, it’s time to take one. Ideally, a soil sample is taken prior to the growing season, but anytime is better than none. Soil fertility changes over time and may not always be optimum for forage growth. Establishing and planting forages for new pastures also requires soil sampling. Pastures in southeastern NC will need to maintain around a 6.5 pH for maximum productivity. Soil pH tends to drop off over time and additional lime may need to be applied in order to bring these levels back to normal. The soil sample will provide useful information with both lime recommendations and fertilization needs.

The second important step to starting off spring growth is fertilization. Meeting the needs of the plant will allow for the optimum production of the crop, whether for grazing or hay. Nutrients are abundant for many producers, with the availability of hog or poultry waste for fertilization. These products work well for providing nutrient needs for forages. Those without access to natural fertilizers will need to provide commercial fertilizers to fill the nutrient gap. Fertilization for warm season grasses should be applied in split applications throughout the growing season, generally with the first application in April. Again, the soil test is a handy tool in knowing what the nutrient needs of your pasture are, being based on what is currently available in the soil and depending

We Need Your Help!
In order to meet your needs and provide the most useful information, we would like input on what topics you would like to read about. Please send any comments or suggestions to us anytime! Feel free to email your ideas to eileen_coite@ncsu.edu and we will work to find a solution or answer to your questions.
Getting Spring Pastures off to the Right Start Continued …

On the type of pasture you are growing.

A third factor to consider may be selectively grazing areas when they’re ready, in other words, rotationally grazing. Many of us turn all the animals out on the whole pasture, when some areas may be overgrazed and in need of rest. Rotationally grazing provides this much needed rest to the grass and forces animals to become more efficient in their consumption of forages, therefore reducing waste. Generally, temporary fence posts and polywire or polytape will achieve this goal.

Finally, along with the growth of our pastures, comes the growth of various weeds. Generally, we want to get rid of weeds, and there are several products on the market to help with this. For the most part, it’s too late to worry about treating winter weeds, such as henbit, geranium, buttercup, wild mustard and garlic, since these have reached the end of their growth cycle anyway. At this point, mowing these weeds is the best option, which will allow sunlight to reach the grass below. Emerging warm season weeds, such as pigweed, dogfennel, bitter sneezeweed, sicklepod, and horsemint can be effectively controlled as long as they are treated while still immature. At the same time, chemical herbicides generally work best when applied in moderate temperature (60 degrees or better), which is right about now. One precaution to note: some herbicides are damaging to neighboring crops, such as tobacco and cotton, so be careful to select a safe product if these plants are close by. Once you’ve identified the weed or weeds you are dealing with, a selection can be made of the most ideal, appropriate, yet economical method or chemical to achieve this goal. For your copy of the most up to date list of herbicides labeled for grass pastures, contact the Wayne County Extension office at 919-731-1520. This will be helpful when making chemical selections to meet your management needs.

Toxic Plant ID

Extension Agents in south central NC have put together an excellent guide on toxic plants that can be found in NC. Generally horses will avoid these plants in the pasture as long as there is other forage for them to eat. The problem with toxic weeds usually occur when the weeds are accidentally baled in hay and the horses are unable to distinguish between the dried weeds and the dried grass. The “Weed ID in Pastures and Hayfields” publication is available online at http://bladen.ces.ncsu.edu - click on “Animal agriculture” in the menu on the left and then scroll down to “Featured Links” and then “Weed ID in Pastures and Hayfields”.

Answers to Kids Corner “A Sweep thru the Barn” Crossword Puzzle…


21. pad
With cold weather firmly upon us, many people are blanket- ing horses for the first time. A few tips will make blanket- ing safer for you and your horse.

**Blanket Types**

In reviewing the basics remember that blankets differ by function. A stable blanket is intended for a horse that is stalled and not directly exposed to heavy weather. A turnout blanket serves for horses that are outside most of the time or may have access to a shed rather than a stall.

Other, lightweight blankets cover horses while being transported in trailers and are often little more than sheets. They will not provide adequate protection in wet, windy conditions.

Fly sheets are just that. They help protect your horse from biting insects in the summer and are not suitable for winter wear.

Select the blanket designed for your situation and make sure it fits properly.

**Blanket Training**

If your horse has never worn a blanket you will have to introduce the idea to him. I've used a small round tablecloth as a training device in the past. It works well because it's small and lightweight. You can handle it easily and desensitize him without trying to rub him down with a more cumbersome horse blanket.

**Blanketing Procedures**

Once your horse accepts standing quietly with a tablecloth over him, you can advance to the blanket. Be sure to approach quietly and ask permission to put it on. I do this every time I blanket. Horses respond better to polite requests than to firm rudeness. You’ll find that a horse who accepts what you’re asking will be much easier, and safer, to blanket.

After sniffing the blanket most horses stand quietly waiting for you to put it on. I approach from the off-side and put the blanket on from front to back. Place it on the neck above the withers and slide it back with the lay of the hair just like you do with a saddle pad. Make sure the blanket straps are hanging down freely. Keeping a hand on the horse’s back, walk around to the near-side checking the blanket’s position and fit.

Begin buckling in the front. Avoid the temptation to get under the horse’s neck to buckle the front straps. You are in the strike zone if the horse panics and the bolt zone if he flees. Stand on the horse’s side with your body in contact with his shoulder. Reach around and buckle the front straps. It’s awkward at first but you’ll develop a pattern for it.

Move next to the straps under the barrel. Older blankets may have used a single girth strap or two straps that were designed to connect like the cinches in a western saddle. More recently we find blankets that use two straps which cross. The rear strap on the off-side connects to the front buckle on the near-side.

Reach under the horse’s belly with your left hand to get each strap. That allows you to keep your body safely in contact with his body without putting yourself in an unsafe position. Adjust the belly straps so that they hang loose without hanging so far that the horse could get a foot caught in them.

Finally move to the horse’s hip and connect the rear leg straps. Avoid the temptation to stand behind the horse in the kick zone. Rather, keep contact with the horse’s hip and reach through to connect the leg straps.

Some people cross the straps, others connect them to the same side. The choice is yours and depends upon blanket configuration, your horse’s conformation, and your personal preference.

**Blanket Removal**

To remove the blanket, reverse the process. Remove the rear leg straps first. I like to reconnect them to the blanket so I know exactly where they are the next time and don’t have to fumble around finding them. You’ll appreciate having done the next time that when it’s cold, dark, windy, and rainy.

Move forward, quickly dropping the belly straps and then the front straps.

Especially in dry conditions, the blanket may have built up static electricity. If you just jerk it off, your horse will get a series of shocks that will be unpleasant for him. You can minimize the effect by running your arms under the blanket, bunching it together from both ends, lifting it up, and pulling it toward you. You may get a shock or two, but the horse will receive less of a jolt.

Check the horse for areas where the blanket may have rubbed or chafed. If the blanket doesn’t fit properly, consider replacing it.

Check the blanket for rips, torn straps, broken buckles, and caked on mud or manure. Repair any damage before using the blanket again. Use a stiff brush to clean off soil to avoid chafing your horse the next time you blanket.

Because we blanket when the weather is bad or going to be bad, we’re often in a hurry and rush. That’s when we make mistakes and get hurt. By getting in the habit of following sound procedures every time, we’ll get the horse warmly blanketed expeditiously and safely.
If you are a lucky horse/mule owner like I am, you can look out your kitchen window and see your trail buddy. If not, you can see him on your trips to the barn. When the wind whips up, and the temperature dips, it makes me wonder, “Is Old Paint cold?” How do you know if he’s cold? Unless you keep your buddy in a barn blanketed and under lights 24/7, then he has a good hair coat going this time of year. Our horses spend their nights in a stall and stay out all day, no matter the weather. The mules just stay out. That might sound cruel, but think about it, horses are designed to roam the plains. They stay happier turned out and don’t develop stable vices if they are allowed to live like a horse, at least for part of their day. They are built to be weather resistant and programmed with storm-survival instincts. There is thicker skin and hair on the back and rump where rain hits first to minimize heat loss. Horses instinctually assume the “butt to the wind” stance for that reason. They face away from the wind with lowered heads so their rump and bushy tails block the wind and rain. Even in a downpour, the thinner skinned areas of the chest and inner hind legs may not even get wet. Instincts also move the horse to seek areas in their environment that are natural windbreaks such as groups of trees and depressions in the ground. If there are no natural windbreaks, a three-sided shelter is needed, with the opening facing away from the prevailing wind. Horses usually do well in cold temperatures, but cold, wet, and windy at the same time can chill them opening the door for upper respiratory diseases. You may think you’re doing Old Paint a favor putting a turn out blanket on him in really cold weather. If his coat is thick, it’s actually compressing the insulating hair fibers, eliminating the layer of warm air between the hair fibers that keep him warm. With all that said, how can you tell if he’s cold? You can’t really until you put your hands on him. He may be standing out in the pasture looking miserable. If he’s shivering, shivering generates heat but uses energy. Excessive shivering is a real problem for a thin horse, they are expending energy they need to keep weight on. A fat horse retains heat better, so the rounder the horse, the warmer he’ll stay. Pull off a glove, feel between the front legs, gently working your fingers through the hair to the skin. If the skin there is warm, the horse should be warm. While you have your glove off, score Old Paint’s body condition. Body condition scoring has been covered in previous articles, your horse should have started winter with a little fat cover to keep him warm. If you choose to use a turn-out blanket, run your hand between it and his body to make sure he feels warm and the blanket is not soaked. Remove it daily for a quick brushing and check the fit, the blanket can cause hair loss, even sores, if it rubs the wrong way. What do you do if he’s cold? Make sure he has access to a windbreak, some kind of shelter out of the wind and rain, then the cold won’t matter as much. Be sure to give Old Paint good quality hay. Hay is fiber, the process of digestion produces heat and that will help warm him up. To make digestion efficient, he must have access to salt, and all the water he’ll drink. Water is essential, a 1000 pound horse will drink an average of 10 gallons a day. A horse cannot meet its water requirements by eating snow, that limits intake and uses additional energy. In winter a horse will drink enough if the water temperature is at least 45˚F. Ice on the water trough or bucket must be broken every day, even twice a day. We did the best thing to keep our water tanks clear, we bought a safe water tank heater, made for livestock. It is the lazy way, I just plug in an extension cord when the temperature is forecasted to be below freezing. The cost of the heater was a small price to pay compared to a veterinarian call for impaction colic and taking a chance of losing my best buddy. Winter has its challenges, making sure your buddy is healthy and happy doesn’t have to be one of them. I look forward to longer days and warmer weather. Stay warm and we’ll see you on the trail.

Is Your Horse Cold?
Cindy Wheaton, Wayne County
The winter of 2009-2010 will likely go on record as being one of the coldest on record. Keeping water buckets free of ice and braving icy winds made December a little more challenging. Deer hunters had warned that the dark hair coats on the deer forewarned us of a cold winter but it still came as a surprise. Having managed horses in central Michigan I have experienced much colder, more imposing winters, but the blood has thinned somewhat in twenty years of North Carolina winters. One thing I have learned over the years is that cold weather is no enemy of the horse in fact, when properly cared for horses seem to enjoy cold weather.

Like many large mammals, the horse prepares for cold weather by eating large amounts of forage, depositing additional body fat, and growing a warm winter hair coat. These adaptations will keep the horse warm as long as the rule of “two out of three” is adhered to. The rule of two out of three stipulates that various combinations of temperature, precipitation and wind determine the comfort of the horse at any given time. If we experience extremes of any two of those factors, cold temperatures and wind, wind and precipitation, or precipitation and cold temperatures, the horse is usually able to maintain a reasonable level of comfort. If however, we have extremely low temperatures, precipitation, and high winds at the same time, the horse will generally not be able to maintain a body temperature at which it would be comfortable. Thus, whenever extremes in temperature, precipitation, and wind are present simultaneously, horses should have access to shelter.

Some horses do not store enough body fat or grow sufficient hair coats to maintain body weight. These horses should be given the opportunity to remain in a warm barn or provided the extra warmth a good blanket can provide. Turn-out blankets are generally sufficient without hoods, but each horse should be monitored to make sure its needs are being met.

What a horse eats in cold weather will also affect its ability to stay warm. When temperatures plummet, feeding additional hay will warm your horse more effectively than feeding additional grain. I know this seems counterintuitive but let’s look at the process of heat production in the horse. Grain provides a concentrated amount of carbohydrates, which are digested primarily in the small intestine. Because forages are primarily digested in the cecum and large intestine towards the end of the digestive tract, and because they take longer to digest, a greater amount of heat is produced. Thus, feeding hay free-choice will more effectively increase your horses ability to maintain warmth in cold weather.

Water is still the most important nutrient consumed by the horse. A one-thousand pound horse will consume at least 10 gallons of water per day. When cold weather freezes ponds and water buckets, horses may not consume as much water as they should. This can lead to colic and other disorders that threaten the well-being of the animal. Replenish water as needed and place bucket trough heaters where appropriate. Whether you use water buckets or automatic waterers it is a good idea to check them at least twice each day, this is equally true in cold and hot weather.

Healthy horses will run, play and enjoy cold weather when given the opportunity. Providing shelter, keeping water available at all times, and feeding free choice forage can help your horse enjoy the cold weather rather than shiver through it.
A Sweep through the Barn

Across

2. Cart you fill when you clean the stall
4. Name for saddle, bridle, etc.
7. Cloth used to wipe down a horse
9. Basic headgear a horse wears
10. Used to spread shavings and smooth dirt
12. Riding aid
14. Used to lead a horse
16. Oats, barley, corn
17. Holds water for a horse to drink
19. Part of a bridle
20. What a rider sits on
22. Has a mane and tail

Down

1. Used to lift and throw hay
3. Used to sweep the tack room
5. A male foal
6. Bedding that looks like hay
8. Newspaper, sand, peanut hulls, etc.
11. Something grain is stored in
13. Wood products used for bedding
15. Individual enclosures inside a barn
18. Leather riding apparel
21. Placed under a saddle
Calendar of Events

- March 6th - State 4-H Horse Bowl & Hippology Contests
- March 12th & 13th - NCSU Equine Hoof Care and Shoeing Short Course, for additional information call (919) 515-5784
- May 22nd & 23rd - Southeast District 4-H Horse Show Bob Martin Ag Center, Williamston NC
- May 1st - Wayne County 4-H/CMHA Horse Show, Pine Level for more information go to www.cmhashows.com
- May 1st & 2nd - Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue, Hope Mills & Parkton NC

For more information about this training please contact Kim Davis at (919) 731-1520

REINS Volunteers by County (Volunteers may be contacted via Extension Agents)

Johnston County: Julie Walls, Will Walls & Roger Davis
Wayne County: Jerry Boone, Lynn Lepley, Vivian Rowe, Cindy Wheaton & Vickie Yelverton
Wilson County: Carol Kyles & Kathy Moore

Hoof Prints is a quarterly newsletter written by a team of experienced and certified equine professionals for persons interested in equine information in Southeastern North Carolina. For more information on material and events presented in this newsletter, contact your local agent and Cooperative Extension office at:

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550 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of $.02 per page