News Column
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BROME FERTILIZATION

I like to think I'm consistent. Dependable. Even predictable. Those are good traits, aren't they?

Over the years, year after year, I have consistently fertilized my brome later than I recommend for others. I'd like to see brome fertilized in January or February but I have been really dependable about getting it done in March.

If I were to predict what I'll do next year, I would say I plan to fertilize brome sometime between December and February,...but I would put money on March if I were a betting man.

I really don't know where the time goes the first two months of the year. I understand that February is a short month but let's face facts, it is only two or three days shorter than the other months. How am I able to slide through February without getting anything done on the farm?

Some years we get caught waiting for moisture, believing maybe we don't want to fertilizer brome if it isn't going to rain. While that is almost a legitimate strategy, brome needs to be fertilized every year to maintain vigor, so we don't want to not fertilize at all in a drier year.

While I'm telling both you and me that it is time to get in gear, some K-State research has shown that brome can be fertilized as late as April with no adverse effect on yield. How late in April? I didn't dig deep enough to find that answer, but let's just go with April 1. That's plenty late.

How much nitrogen to apply will depend upon desired yield, the price of fertilizer and the price of hay. In general, most of us will apply 80 to 100 pounds of nitrogen, and some will apply phosphorus and sulfur as recommended by a soil test.

Research shows hay production still increasing as N rates are increased, up to about 120 pounds on nitrogen. Beyond 120 pounds production levels off most years, making higher N rates unprofitable.

Timing of fertilizer applications depends upon the planned use. For hay production the December to February window is a good target for most producers. However, K-State research has shown that applying all the fertilizer in the fall will normally result in slightly higher yields. The downside to applying everything in the fall is that protein content of the forage will be slightly lower.

If fall grazing is planned, then about 40% of N and all P should be applied in late August or early September. For grazing you might shoot for 100 total pounds of N, with 60 to 70 pounds applied now and another 30 to 40 pounds applied in late August.

Potassium is usually adequate in this part of the state so I wouldn't expect to need to apply any K. Phosphorus levels, on the other hand, will decline over time, so phosphorus fertilization will eventually be needed.

No self-respecting county agent would talk about fertilization with telling you to take a soil test, so here you go. The only way to know if you need phosphorus or potassium, and how much to apply, is through a soil test. Test your soil and apply fertilizer as needed.

Even if you are going to use the shotgun approach and just apply 80 pounds on N and 20 pounds of P this year, test your soil anyway. Those results will still be good next spring when you are late getting around to testing again.

If you have questions you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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