

“Don’t ‘pug’ your pastures,” advises an AgriLife Extension expert

March 17, 2009

Writer(s):

Steve Byrns, 325-653-4576,s-byrns@tamu.edu

Contact(s): Dr. Wayne Hanselka, 361-265-9203 c-hanselka@tamu.edu

BASTROP - “Don’t pug your pastures,” is the advice a Texas AgriLife Extension Service expert offers producers who received much-needed rain last week on recently burned pastures.

Dr. Wayne Hanselka, AgriLife Extension range specialist at Corpus Christi, said pugging is a term used when too many cattle or other livestock are kept too long on wet pastures with limited or no forage. The result is intensively trampled soil which leads to soil compaction, poor plant growth and greater fertilizer requirements on tame pastures.

He said if the practice continues the damage would increase to the point that pastures start to rapidly decline in quality, sometimes permanently.

“All of Texas is suffering from months of no rain,” Hanselka said. “Recent rains across a wide swath of Texas last week followed by warm weather this week has producers as eager for spring green-up as are their cows. But just because it rained once doesn’t mean we’re out of the woods yet. Those unfortunate enough to have suffered the ravages of a fire this winter must realize any grass they have left has little or no stored nutrients in its root system.

“Grazing the first green on burned pastures could easily kill the grass or weaken it so a continuing drought would kill it. Stressed grass needs time before it is grazed and the necessary soil nutrients must be added if cutting hay is the intent.”

Hanselka advises producers to keep feeding on well-drained, heavily turfed areas or if no such area is available to drylot the cows, providing selling the animals is not a consideration.

Hanselka said cutting losses by destocking is the most logical way out when no other pasture is available. But when years of herd genetics are at stake, he concedes that for some producers this is not an option.

He said the sparse green which the recent rains will soon bring to many decimated pastures will not be enough to keep cattle fed.

“A cow needs 35-40 pounds of dry forage a day just to maintain her,” Hanselka said. “What little they are getting now is hurting the grass far more than it is helping the cattle.”

“Cows typically waste as much forage through trampling, dunging and other activities as they eat,” he said. “There are also losses due to insects, plant maturity and decay. So just leaving cows in a damaged pasture can be devastating whether there is anything for them to eat or not.”

Hanselka said when the rains finally do return, erosion and subsequent leaching and loss of topsoil are other serious problems producers who over-graze will face.

“Look down the road,” he said. “When it looks like it can’t get any worse, just know when it comes to poor pasture management, it can.”

For more information contact Hanselka at 361-265-9203, c-hanselka@tamu.edu .

-30-

We grant permission for the use of this news as a free service to the news media. Articles may be used either in their entirety or in part, provided that attribution remains. You may print the stories and art or you may put it on your Web sites. High resolution photos, audio and video also are provided with many of our articles for your use at agnews.tamu.edu