

## **SPEND A LITTLE-SAVE A LOT**

*Dr. Gary Bates, Director  
UT Beef and Forage Center*

One of the great things about being a specialist with The University of Tennessee is it provides the opportunity to help producers in their operations. I feel very blessed to have a job in which I present research-based recommendations to producers to help their profitability. But if you have very listened to one of my presentations, you may have realized that we have more recommendations than you can actually have time to accomplish. And not just time, but if you start adding up the cost of all our recommendations, nobody can spend your money like I can. It is all a matter of prioritizing which recommendations will help solve the biggest problems found in your operations. If we look at some of the basic recommendations UT Extension has for forage producers, the following are some of the most dependable recommendations to help a producer's bottom line.

**Soil testing** – This may be one of the most recommended practices we have. Taking a soil test to determine the fertility status of the soil is the basic recommendation that needs to be followed by any crop producer. If you are depending on forage to provide the feed needed by livestock, then the growth is dependent on having the proper pH and adequate phosphate and potash. If pH is low, or one of the nutrients is limiting, then growth will be reduced. Fertilizing without a soil test is basically just assuming you are putting the correct level of nutrients out. And assuming can cause problems.

**Forage testing** – The average livestock producer in the southeast is going to need to feed hay during the winter. We normally will not have enough forage growth to support grazing throughout this period. The protein and energy content of the hay is dependent on the stage of maturity at harvest. How do you know if the hay has enough to meet the needs of you herd? Test your hay to find out. The UT Soil, Plant and Pest Center will help you determine if you need supplementation.

**Stockpiling tall fescue** – One of the largest expenses in a cattle operation is the cost of feeding a cow during the winter. The bulk of this expense is the cost of producing, harvesting and feeding hay. Every day we can graze instead of feeding hay will result in a cheaper daily feed cost for a cow herd. One of our best methods to increase winter grazing is by stockpiling tall fescue. Stockpiling is simply setting aside a portion of tall fescue pastures and allowing the growth to accumulate for grazing during winter. Nitrogen does not have to be applied for stockpiling to be successful, but it will increase the amount of forage produced during the fall growing season.

**Feeding hay correctly** – There are several methods to feed hay. Rolled out on ground or in rings are two common methods. Almost any method of feeding hay can be successful if done correctly. However, if done incorrectly, hay waste during feeding can be dramatic. It isn't unusual to have 25 to 30% feeding loss. The main thing that influences the feeding loss is how much hay is put out at one time. The most efficient way to feed hay is to limit the amount of hay to a single day's worth. The more hay put out, the more

that will be wasted. This is particularly true if you are feeding hay rolled out on the ground. If you have to put out more than one day's worth at a time, it will be important to feed in a ring, which will reduce feeding loss.