

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

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The other day someone posed an interesting question to me. If I had to choose between liming, a herbicide for weed control, or clovers, which one would I choose. They wanted me to give an opinion on which of those recommended practices are the most beneficial and economical. The problem is that answer will depend on the specific situation. Is the pH 5.5 or 6.0? Is the weed pressure light or heavy? Many things influence the level of benefit from a practice.

That conversation got me to thinking about how producers make decisions on which recommendations to follow and which to put off to the future. If you try to follow every recommendation from The University of Tennessee you may run out of time, or money, or possibly both. So if you can't do everything, how do you decide which one to work toward?

One of the best things you can do is to look at the economics of the recommendation. How much does it cost versus how much benefit do you get. If one practice will get you an extra five dollars and acre profit, and one will make you 15 dollars, then if you only have money for one, let's make \$15 profit rather than just five.

Some of you may roll your eyes when you read this because it is so obvious. Dr. Andrew Griffith may need to read it twice to understand. You would be right - it is a very simple concept. But I wonder how many practices are avoided because of how much they cost, rather than how much profit they will make.

For instance, how many of you have ever chosen a cheaper variety of clover because the best one cost an extra dollar per pound? One of the better varieties of red clover may cost an extra dollar per pound, but will yield an extra ton per acre. If I seed four pounds per acre, I have saved four dollars but given up \$50-60 of extra forage.

The trick comes in determining what the economic benefit will be for each of the practices. The most dependable thing we can do is look at research studies to see the impact of specific practices. That is a large part of what The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture does in its research effort.

The point of this article is to make forage management decision based not only on how much a practice costs, but on how much benefit you can get from it.