

District Extension Agent  
Crops & Soils/Horticulture

### ***The Effects of Late Season Usage on Cool Season Grasses***

If ‘typical’ weather patterns hold true (this year could be an exception based on some weather models...), we’re looking at about 50-60 days of opportunity for our brome grass hay fields and pastures to recover from summer use and get ready for dormancy.

Brome grass stands across the District come in many different forms, and what each requires prior to dormancy is different as well. All, however, require some level of rest and regrowth prior to the dormant period, making our stand management now very important.

With adequate moisture and moderate temperatures (brome loves the seventies...), grasses grow rapidly. Photosynthesis starts and green leaves transfer energy to roots when adequate leaf area is achieved to do both. This helps maintain the plant through the winter and initiates green-up next spring. It’s a simple, but often overlooked, process that has a lot to do with how plants prosper – or perish under certain conditions.

Some area stands have seen excellent recovery since last use and regrowth that may be tempting to consider haying/grazing this fall. Others are struggling, particularly those defoliated by armyworms. Instead of lush green growth, there’s little left outside of stubble.

Whatever ‘slot’ your stand falls in to, manage carefully from here forward. If additional haying/grazing is going to occur, make sure to leave adequate regrowth. Four to six inches of green growth is the minimum suggested prior to entering dormancy. Plants with less than that level of regrowth often don’t have enough photosynthetic capacity to produce top growth *and* root growth simultaneously, meaning root systems may be weak going in to the dormant period. Root system reserves are what kick the plant off next spring. If low, stands may be slow to green up and yields may be reduced – next year and beyond.

While you’re monitoring grazing/haying/armyworm recovery, consider a soil test. Stands with lower fertility levels often face increased recovery challenges due to low nutrient levels. For more information about forage recovery or soil testing, contact me at any of our District Offices.

### ***‘Other Crop’ on the Seed Label***

It won’t be long until it’s time to overseed or reseed home lawns. When you do, read the product’s seed tag first to avoid seeding unwanted grasses like orchardgrass or rough bluegrass. Both have become huge problems in many turfgrass stands because of their color, texture, height, or growing season differences in relation to more commonly planted turfgrass species.

When checking labels, look for percent ‘other crop’ or ‘other crop seed’. Both would include any species intentionally grown for some purpose – including turfgrasses (other than the one you are buying) and pasture grasses, Orchardgrass and rough bluegrass being two. Seed labels are required by law to show the percentage (by weight) of ‘Other Crop Seed’ in the bag, but unless a species constitutes five percent or more, the label doesn’t have to list each species by name. It can make knowing whether the ‘other crop’ percent is a concern a challenge.

It’s difficult to say how much is too much. You won’t even notice the presence of some species, while others may change the look of the lawn considerably. Even a half to one percent ‘other crop’ can mean a lawn filled with hard to control – or tolerate – weedy species. Keep ‘other crop’ as close to zero as possible (most good quality seeding is .01 percent ‘other crop’ or less). If ‘Weed Seed’ is on the label, make sure it is at .01 percent or less as well.