

## FORAGE

# Preparation promotes successful winter pasture season

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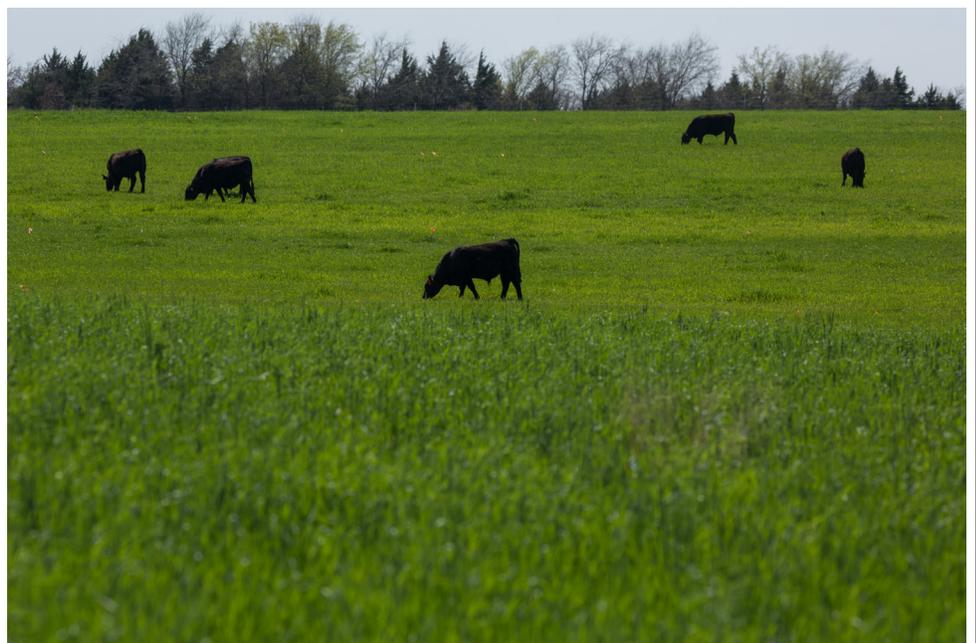


**Seems like only** a short time ago we were getting ready for the start of the 2015-2016 winter pasture season. Now, we are looking square in the face of the 2016-2017

season. If you have not started preparing for the season, start now with a look at potential weather conditions. According to a U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook prediction model at this writing for a period that ends Sept. 30, temperatures may be slightly above normal and precipitation near normal. If this holds up, soil temperatures should be warm with moisture available, leading to rapid emergence once we get the seed in the ground.

In order to get the seed in the ground, varieties need to be selected and sourced. I recently combined all Noble Foundation small grain variety trial information from 1966-2012 into one data set. A graph of the average total yield of wheat, oat, rye and triticale varieties is shown in Figure 1.

There is some variation from year to year in the data set indicating yearly differences in environmental conditions; but looking at the trend line, total dry matter increased nearly 2,000 pounds per acre over time. Nitrogen rates have increased over time, accounting for



some of the increase seen in yield, but have remained fairly steady since 1970. A big change is in the varieties. Only one variety in the 1967 data set, Elbon rye, appears in the 2012 results, which is certainly a tribute to its longevity. New varieties are released for a reason; they outperform older ones.

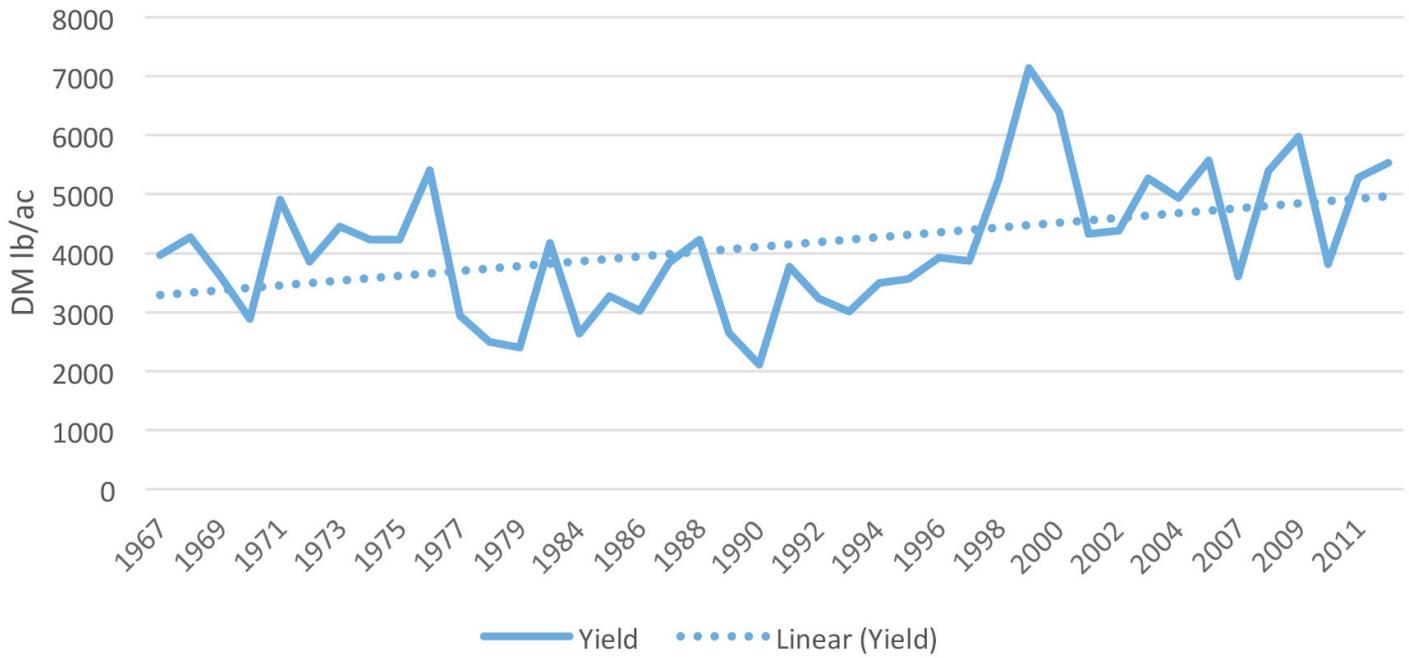
If you have planted the same variety for a number of years, take a look at some of the new ones. They offer increased yield, disease tolerance, improvements in seasonal forage distribution and improvements in other traits. Noble Foundation through Oklahoma Genetics Inc. recently released new

wheat, triticale, rye and oat varieties that are currently on the market.

Next on the preparation list is a soil test. Soil testing has been around for more than 60 years, but only a little more than half of stocker producers use it. Soil testing helps you get the most out of your crop and can influence variety selection. If a soil test reveals acidic soils, you may wish to select a variety that is more tolerant of acidic soils.

Seedbed preparation is also essential for good seed-to-soil contact and establishment. If you are in no-till production and will be applying a burndown herbicide application prior ▶

Figure 1. Average dry matter forage yield of small grains from Noble Foundation variety trials in Ardmore, Oklahoma, from 1967-2012



to planting, follow the recommended rates. Going off label and lowering rates can lead to herbicide resistance in weeds, which eventually creates problems for everyone. Another part of correct application is calibrating the spray rig to make sure it is applying what you think it is. Nozzles wear and rates change over time. If it has been awhile since you have done a thorough inspection and calibration of your spray equipment, winter pasture preparation time is a good time to get that done. Calibration methods can be found at [www.noble.org/ag/tools](http://www.noble.org/ag/tools).

Also, inspect planting equipment for blockages and broken parts. I hate

to stop for repairs in the field. Doing a good job in the shop prior to planting helps. Calibrate planting equipment. Parts wear and seed size changes. Calibration will help you overcome these changes and ensure you get the right rates in the field.

Finally a word about seed: doing everything right but planting poor quality seed can lead to disastrous results. Be sure your seed has been tested for germination and vigor. Seeding rates can be adjusted for low germination and vigor, but you need to know this prior to planting.

Hopefully, this will turn out to be a successful year for winter pasture with

cattle going out early. A little preparation prior to planting can help make it successful. Seed supplies should be very good with the exception of some of the latest varieties, which may be somewhat limited. ■