

BOONEVILLE PLANT PRESS

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PMC Trains Livestock Producers How to Plant Native Warm Season Grasses for Forage



Figure 1: Hay meadow in Franklin County shows the difference between green switchgrass and dormant bermudagrass (taken during July 2012 drought)

A group of ten livestock producers from Sebastian and Crawford counties met at the Booneville Plant Materials Center (BPMC) on December 5 to learn how to plant and manage native warm season grasses for livestock forage.

BPMC staff collaborated with the NRCS Fort Smith Field Service Center to offer a comprehensive workshop

showing producers how to integrate native warm season grasses into their existing grazing rotations. These producers will be planting native grasses as part of Arkansas NRCS's drought relief program, which is funded by the Farm Bill. The program is designed to not only provide better wildlife habitat by diversifying the number of grass species, but also increase forage production in extreme drought conditions.

Most producers rely on bermudagrass as a primary source of summer forage. Many producers report that bermudagrass in their pastures simply went dormant during the summer drought and stopped producing forage, forcing many to begin feeding hay. Native warm season grasses possess deep roots that allow them



Figure 2: Landowners and NRCS employees learn how to identify eastern gamagrass

to access more soil moisture than bermudagrass. Native warm season grasses, such as eastern gamagrass and switchgrass, break dormancy early in the spring and may be grazed up to one month before bermudagrass is ready to graze or cut for hay.

Field office staff members Bryan Jacobs and Jane Lowry facilitated the training to assist landowners in their counties. Greg Watkins, NRCS grazing specialist, also provided guidelines for grazing native warm season grasses as part of a rotational grazing system. BPMC staff taught landowners how to buy native warm season grass seed, calculate seeding rates, calibrate a seed drill, and demonstrated how to prepare a firm seedbed with conventional farm equipment. Producers toured the BPMC farm fields to gain insight about the characteristics of different grasses such as indiangrass, eastern gamagrass, and switchgrass.

If you would like to schedule a tour of the BPMC farm, or would like more information about integrating native warm season grasses into your grazing rotation, please call the BPMC or contact your local NRCS field office.

PMC Hosts Arkansas Professional Soil Classifiers' Annual Meeting

The Booneville Plant Materials Center hosted the annual meeting of the Arkansas Professional Soil Classifiers on October 18 and 19. The diverse group is composed of professionals who map soil for government agencies such as NRCS and the US Forest Service, members of academia, and those who interpret soils information for septic system design.



Figure 3: Group members discuss the Taft soil series pit

The group took part in classifying three different soil pits on the BPMC farm, including the Leadvale, Taft, and Enders series. Soil profile pictures taken from soil pits on the farm

may be included in a publication detailing the soils of Arkansas. The meeting also included presentations on a wide variety of topics, including organic vegetable production, plant materials for bioenergy crop production, and graduate research projects from students at the University of Arkansas.



Figure 4: The poorly drained Taft soil series has a seasonally perched water table



Figure 5: Leadvale soil series has better soil drainage and is the primary soil type on the BPMC



Figure 6: Curt Osier examines part of the dark-colored fragipan soil layer

Plant Materials Center Sponsors Two Free Soil Health One-Day Workshops

The Booneville PMC teamed up with the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) and the NRCS National Soil Health and Sustainability Team to offer two free soil health workshops for landowners and NRCS staff. Course instructors David Lamm and Steve Woodruff traveled to Arkansas from the NRCS East National Technical Support Center in Greensboro, North Carolina and held one session on Tuesday October 30 at UAPB in Lonoke and one session Wednesday October 31 at the NRCS Field Service Center in Conway.

The instructors emphasized the importance of good soil health for productive agricultural lands, shared methods of assessing soil health, and described management strategies to achieve healthier, more productive soils. Lamm and Woodruff also discussed the benefits of reduced tillage systems in crop production, how to use cover crops, and practices to improve soil health on pastureland. Course attendees participated in demonstrations comparing soil from conventional and minimum tillage systems in Arkansas.



Figure 7: Soybean crop grown in cover crop residue to improve soil quality.



Figure 8: The Dust Bowl of the 1930s stripped away millions of tons of productive topsoil (USDA photo).

John Lee, Arkansas state agronomist, also showed participants how to implement soil health practices by using NRCS conservation programs. The Booneville PMC staff wishes to thank David Lamm and Steve Woodruff for leading the course and NRCS District Conservationists Joe Tapp and Amanda Mathis for collecting soil samples for course demonstrations.

If you would like more information about cover crops or other soil health topics, contact the Booneville PMC or visit the NRCS Soil Health and Sustainability website at <http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/>

Our Mission Statement:

The mission of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Plant Materials (PM) Programs is to develop, test, and transfer effective state-of-the-art plant science technology to meet customer and resource needs. NRCS PMC activities are consistent with the objectives of the current United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and NRCS Strategic Plan namely to provide timely and effective vegetative solutions for identified resource needs.

About Us:

The Dale Bumpers Small Farm Research Center is home to The USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Services- Booneville Plant Materials Center and the USDA Agricultural Research Service. We are located at 6883 South State Hwy 23, Booneville, Arkansas 72927. You may contact us at (479) 675-5182, Fax: (479) 675-5466. Our hours are from 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., Monday through Friday. **If you would like a tour of the Center please call to schedule an appointment.** Our staff members are: Randy King, Manager, Alayna Jacobs, Assistant Manager, Debbie Orick, Office Assistant, Eddie Pratt and Dale Goff, Biological Science Technicians. The primary service area of the Center encompasses 53 million acres of Arkansas, Oklahoma and Missouri.



Figure 9: Booneville PMC service area

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