

IMPACT OF ALFALFA IN LINCOLN COUNTY

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Lincoln County is located 45 miles south of Lexington, Kentucky. It is part of 3 geographical regions of the state-the outer Bluegrass, the Knobs, and the Eastern Pennyroyal area. Thus the land ranges from moderate sloping fields that can be row cropped to fields that are nearly too steep to mow. The majority of the land is best suited for hay and pasture production. The soil fertility is moderately high with limestone, sandstone, shale and siltstone parent material. The land is very well suited to growing very productive forage crops.

Lincoln County farmers have utilized the resources of the land very well and developed quality livestock and forage systems. These farmers realize that good forage leads to better livestock profits. Lincoln County has a strong livestock industry that generates over \$23 million annually. The good forage produced is the backbone of that strong livestock industry. Lincoln County is the 6th largest cattle and calves production county in the state, the 8th largest beef cow county, the 5th largest dairy county and has a sizeable goat and pleasure horse enterprise. It takes a lot of feed for this livestock industry. We annually produce 9,000 acres of alfalfa, 32,000 acres of grass and grass legume hay, 7,000 acres of corn silage, 2,500 acres of small grain mostly for silage, hay, and pasture and 30,000+ acres of pasture.

Lincoln County farmers have a reputation for being good forage producers. Over the years they have produced good yields and good quality. Much of this is a result of their willingness to learn how to improve their forage production. I must thank the Lincoln County forage pioneers who blazed the way to better forage production. They've made my job easy because the producers were already doing a good job and had the desire to learn more about improving pasture, silage, and hay crops. I have to thank Kelsey Driskill, Russell Cornelius, Charlie Schnitzler, Wallace Campbell, J.B. Holtzclaw, Ken Evans and others who led the way to better forages. And I must continue thanking Warren Thompson for being the Alfalfa Ambassador to Lincoln County, spending many days there helping agents, farmers and industry produce and market great crops of alfalfa. Thanks to them, 65-70% of the pasture is improved with legumes and fertility management, renovation is a standard practice, no-till is the popular renovation method, and alfalfa grazing is a regular practice. These guys left me big shoes to fill!

Thanks to the help of these pioneers and the support of Dr. Lacefield and Dr. Henning, I've tried to continue to have extensive educational programs on forage production and livestock's utilization of the forage. I have had 24 years of all types of

forage demonstrations. I believe these demonstrations have really complimented our educational efforts for all forages.

I have no doubt though that our alfalfa projects have had the greatest impact on our county's agricultural economy. We have compared hay varieties, looked at weed control, hay marketing, no-till seeding, chemical preservatives, baleage, fertility management and etc. Our educational efforts have helped our producers achieve those 7 ton yields, produce clean hay, and preserve quality hay and silage. We've helped 12-15 producers develop cash alfalfa hay as a major enterprise marketing that hay in the area and across the south. Alfalfa has made good money for our livestock producers and cash hay sellers.

But, our greatest effort that has the potential to really impact our state's and region's livestock industry is our work with alfalfa grazing. In the fall of 1989, Warren Thompson told me about what I believe is "Grazings-Greatest Find". The first true grazing alfalfa-Alfagraze bred by Dr. Joe Bouton at the University of Georgia. Thanks to Warren Thompson and America's Alfalfa, the first on farm test of Alfagraze was seeded in the spring of 1990 on the John Elliott Farm. We compared Apollo to Alfagraze under stocker and beef cow grazing pressure. We quickly saw that the Alfagraze could take the abuse and keep on producing. We found it to be good for hay fields as well as grazing. The Alfagraze lasted 7 years which was twice the length of the Apollo. We shared our findings through field days, tours and media methods. Each year we added more Alfagraze demos around the county and these farmers also had great success. Our farmers quickly began to seed Alfagraze for grazing and hay for beef stockers, beef cows, and dairy cattle.

As you know this led to a flurry of activity to develop the next generation of alfalfa grazing varieties. We find Alfagraze to still be great but we see grazing varieties. Now with better disease resistance, quicker re-growth, and higher yields. Most all of our good seed companies have quality grazing alfalfas now.

I want to share some of our producers success with alfalfa grazing programs. John Elliott has gone from the first 5 acre test plot to over 150 acres of alfalfa for grazing. He has doubled his pasture yields, increased calf gains by .5-.7 lbs. per day, enjoyed a 95% conception rate on a 60 day breeding program, increased his cow herd by 60%, backgrounds his calves and makes a lot of good round bale alfalfa haylage to feed his livestock. Elliott and I agree that grazing alfalfa has made a tremendous impact on his farming profits.

Holtzclaw Farms have great success with alfalfa grazing. They utilize their hills planting no-till corn. Then they graze the corn November-January. They then freeze seed grazing alfalfas, clovers, and orchardgrass on these hills. They were doing great with clover, but thanks to the grazing alfalfas, they have increased their stocker steer numbers by 15%. They have enjoyed 2.5 lbs. per day gains on alfalfa grass. They buy calves at 400 pounds and put them on the alfalfa-grass fields. In November, they get access to the corn, alfalfa fields and alfalfa-grass round bale silage. They sold their

calves January 9 weighing 950 pounds at \$1.02 per pound. Bill Holtzclaw says, “alfalfa makes the cream for me.”

Lincoln County’s “Mr. Alfalfa” is Roy Reichenbach. He has sold a lot of tons of quality alfalfa hay to satisfied dairy and horse customers for thirty years. He has been a pioneer for no-till alfalfa seeding. He has helped us do a lot of alfalfa demonstrations and hosted numerous tours of his farm. He had always had some success grazing alfalfa in dry years and in November. So when Alfagraze came along he jumped on it really quick and now he sow’s grazing alfalfa in all of his pastures and about 90% of his hay fields. He has seeded alfalfa on hills that most folks won’t ride a tractor on thus greatly enhancing that land’s grazing potential. Reichenbach has been able to increase his stocker numbers by 30%, enjoy better daily gains, produce gain cheaper on cattle than when on silage, and produce quality alfalfa-grass that is great for his feeding and cash hay enterprises.

Our dairy farmers have had great success with alfalfa grazing also. Bo Gander saw a 13 lb. increase in milk production in 2 years of grazing. He added 15 more cows to the herd without additional acreage. He enjoyed cheaper feed cost and better production. Eddie Simpson saw 12 lb. per cow increase in milk production thanks to alfalfa grazing. He no longer had the summer slump and as Eddie says, “It’s so easy to do.”

There are many more success stories for our beef and dairy producers who are grazing. Alfalfa grazing has helped us increase livestock productivity while reducing feed costs thus making bigger profits for our farmers. We have just scratched the surface in regard to the potential for more alfalfa grazing in Lincoln County. We now know that those fescue and sagegrass hills all over Kentucky and the region can be converted into productive alfalfa-grass pastures. That can mean more cattle, more milk, more goats, more hay and more profits for our farmers. The potential is tremendous.

Alfalfa acreage is growing in the county. We have moved up to be the 4th largest alfalfa producing county in the state. The Phase I cost share dollars helped us increase our acreage nearly 2000 acres in the past three years to where we now have 9000 acres. I get questions all the time from farmers who want to add alfalfa acreage. Our beef cow producers have realized that feeding alfalfa grass hay to their cows generally eliminates the need to feed grain and or protein tubs. They realize they can produce a pound of gain cheaper. I expect a good growth in acreage of alfalfa for beef cows as our herds are growing to offset lost tobacco income.

As we consider the more opportunities available using alfalfa, there is the chance for more beef profits. Producers can run more cattle per acre, have better calving rates, more average daily calf gains, all which add up to better profits. Dairy farmers also have the chance to use alfalfa to make more dairy profits as they will be able to run more cows and heifers per acre, have better quality feed, thus increasing daily milk production while actually decreasing feed costs. Producers with other livestock species can also enjoy better profits thanks to alfalfa production.

Alfalfa has had a huge impact on Lincoln County, but we're not where I want our farmers to be yet. Thus, I challenge myself to do more educational programs. I see the need for more demonstrations, more field days, meetings, cost share programs and other methods to show farmers. The benefits of producing and utilizing alfalfa on their farms.

To Kentucky farmers, I challenge you to take advantage of the benefits of alfalfa for hay and grazing. Alfalfa is Queen of the Forage Crops. It is our best forage. That should be important to farmers who want to make money because "Better Forage Equals Better Profits".