

THE 2012 FORAGE MANAGER'S GUIDE TO THE SUNBELT AG EXPO

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Dennis Hancock, Forage Extension Specialist

The University of Georgia

Many of you enjoy making an annual visit to the Sunbelt Ag Expo, and it is certainly one of my favorite events, too. Where else can you see all that the agriculture industry has to offer in one spot? But, it can be overwhelming. There's just SO much to see!

A few years back, I wrote the "Forage Manager's Guide to the Sunbelt Ag Expo." In the intervening years, several Georgia Cattlemen have asked me to put this article out again. So, back by popular demand, here is an updated "Forage Manager's Guide to the Sunbelt Ag Expo" that details the top 5 items that should be on the "To Do" list for anyone interested in forage management and production.

1) Advances in Fencing and Watering Systems

Each year at the Expo, I see several companies who are selling the latest in fencing supplies and watering systems. With all the new, convenient, and relatively inexpensive fencing and watering systems on the market, it has never been easier or more cost-effective to setup a more efficient grazing system. In my discussions with many of these supply companies, I've found them to be willing and able to help one find the right system for their farm. I encourage you to check out the latest quick-connect watering troughs and the new quick and easy wire tensioning systems. (Boy! Don't I wish we had that back in the days when I fixed fence!) If you are going to be looking for new fencing supplies or watering systems, let me suggest that you do a little reading on the subject before your visit. There are two excellent resources that I recommend: 1) Electric Fencing for Serious Graziers and 2) Watering Systems for Serious Graziers. Both of these publications were put together by some of colleagues mine in Missouri. These are easy reads and they are full of excellent pictures and illustrated descriptions. Both can be found on the Georgia Forages website (www.georgiaforages.com) by clicking on the "Publications" page and looking under "National Publications" toward the bottom of that page. (If you have trouble, use the search function on our website.)

2) Suppliers of Superior Seed

Every July, researchers and Extension Specialists at UGA, University of Florida, and Auburn University review and revise the variety recommendations based on yield and persistence data in our variety trials. Several new varieties have been released in the last few years. Those new varieties frequently are substantially better than older varieties, but the supply of that seed may be limited as seed production begins to ramp up. As a result, seed of these new and better varieties may not show up to your local farm store in the first few years after release. To purchase the latest and greatest variety, one may need to make contact directly with the seed company. Each of the major forage seed companies have booths at the Expo. This is a rare opportunity to visit with their representatives in person. It is a great time to line up the purchase and delivery of the best varieties on the market. For more on recommended forage varieties and the companies that sell them, check out the links from www.georgiaforages.com to the "Forage Variety Recommendations" page and the information provided on the Statewide Variety Trial website.

3) Hay Equipment Demonstrations

Ok, I'll admit it! The farm boy in me loves to see the hay equipment demos at the Sunbelt Expo. It certainly is rare to see so many brands of hay equipment being demonstrated side-by-side. The hay equipment demonstrations (put on by the various equipment manufacturers) gives one the chance to really see which models are more efficient and appropriate for your farm. On each of the three days, the equipment companies will be demonstrating their hay cutting, tedding, raking, and baling implements at various times. As I know many of you may be making purchasing decisions based (in part) on what you see in these demos, I've put together a set of basic bullet points on the different styles of hay cutting, conditioning, tedding, raking, and round-baler implements (see inset).

Inset:

Implement	Comments
Cutter-bar Styles	
Sicklebar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Usually 10-20% less expense - Usually requires 30% less hp - Repairs are less expensive
Disk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faster ground speed - Cuts through ant hills better - Maintenance time is usually much less - Better if crop is lodged
Conditioner Option	
Impeller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best for fine-stemmed grasses (e.g., bermudagrass) - Usually saves ½ - 1 day of drying - Causes high leaf loss when used on legumes (e.g., clovers, alfalfa, etc.)
Roller-crimper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best for thicker-stemmed forages (e.g., alfalfa, pearl millet, etc.) - Usually saves ½ - 1 day of drying, but not as helpful on fine-stemmed grass - Lower leaf loss when used on legumes (e.g., clovers, alfalfa, etc.)
Hay Tedders	
Many styles work well.	- Efficiency (e.g., acres/hour, hp requirements, fuel efficiency, etc.)
Compare on the basis of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ease of transport (Does it fold? How easily? Towable on the highway? etc.) - Rugged build (well-designed to prevent damage, low repair costs/down time)
Hay Rakes	
Parallel bar rake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lowest dry matter (DM) losses - Usually ground-driven and slow - Can be used in tandem (two hooked together)
Rotary rakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smaller scale, PTO-driven - Sometimes are dual use (i.e., doubles as a tedder)
Wheel rakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operated at a higher speed (saves time and usually more fuel efficient) - Tend to leave more in the field; high DM losses
Round Hay Balers	
Variable-chambered balers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belt-type balers - Size and density of the bale can be adjusted - Generally maintain a more uniformly dense bale
Fixed-chambered balers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fixed bale dimensions with bales formed by interior rollers - Some equipped with forage chopper (aids bale processing/use in mixers)
Many styles work well.	- Efficiency (e.g., acres/hour, hp requirements, fuel efficiency, etc.)
Compare on the basis of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to net wrap (quicker bale binding in the field, lower storage losses) - Match bale size to size of equipment - Wider pick-up leaves less in the field - Bale density (major improvements have been made in the past few years) should be greater than 11 lbs/ft³ to reduce handling time and storage space.

4) The Southeast Hay Contest Booth

As many of you know, hay samples are submitted from 12 southeastern states for our annual Southeast Hay Contest that is held in conjunction with the Sunbelt Ag Expo. We always get some really high quality hay and this year's contest is shaping up to be a real barn-burner (sorry for the poorly chosen metaphor). Each year we receive around 200 entries. This year, we're expecting even more. What is most interesting about this, however, is that all the winners must supply samples of their winning entries for us to display during Expo week at the Hay Contest's booth in the Livestock Barn. Some of these hay samples are quite exotic. It is definitely worth your time to stop by and see some of these winning entries.

5) The "Ask the Expert" Booth

Right beside the Hay Contest booth is the "Ask the Expert" booth. Now, if you have conjured up in your mind's eye a vision of a Peanuts cartoon with Lucy setting at a booth charging Charlie Brown 5¢ for psychiatric advice... well, yeah, it is sort of like that! There are a few differences, though. First, we don't charge you anything. Second, none of us are qualified to offer psychiatric help (though some of us could use it). Nonetheless, we'll try to help answer any question you have on forage management, beef cattle production, economic outlooks for the beef industry in the coming months, or any other related subject. This is an excellent opportunity for you to meet and discuss some of these issues with some of the best Extension Specialists in the Southeast. Plus, at seven different times during the day, there will be seminars and demonstrations on forage management, cattle production issues, and cattle handling equipment. Come by and see us.

More information on the forage and beef cattle management events at the Sunbelt Ag Expo can be found on the Georgia Forages website (www.georgiaforages.com) and by visiting the Expo's website (www.sunbeltexpo.com). Of course, your local University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Agent can also provide you with additional information about some of these events at the Sunbelt Ag Expo. If you have questions about these issues, contact your local Extension office by dialing 1-800-ASK-UGA1.



Mower-conditioners of every sort are demonstrated each day of the Sunbelt Ag Expo, along with hay tedders, rakes, baling, and bale-handling equipment.