

A Little Bit Extra

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The Cajun people of southern Louisiana use the French word "Lagnippe" to describe something beneficial or a little bit extra that comes free in a business deal or from nature. Sometimes, in a Cajun restaurant the owner may supply the customer some little tasty item of food that was not originally ordered. Likewise, in pasture production we have a number of lagnippe items that are nice little extras that we had not planned on getting. Some of these lagnippe make significant contributions to improved forage and livestock production even though they cost the pasture owner little or nothing.

Crabgrass

This warm season annual grass, native to southern Africa, is often condemned as a nasty weed in row crops and lawns but it is a valuable forage plant for cattle producers. Here is a productive grass that dependably reseeds each year, grows from spring until autumn, responds well to nitrogen fertilizer, and has good nutritive quality. With crude protein content of 12 to 14% and digestibility of 70% or more, crabgrass is superior to bermudagrass. Cattle like crabgrass and do well on it. If stands of perennial grasses are thin, crabgrass generally fills in the skips and adds to production. It is a common component of endophyte-infected tall fescue pastures and helps dilute the toxic alkaloids in the grass. The presence of crabgrass in these infected tall fescue pastures is one of the main

reasons that cattle grazing them do not have more toxicity symptoms. Some farmers graze winter annual pastures of rye, wheat, or annual ryegrass closely in late spring to allow germination of crabgrass which is then fertilized to provide summer grazing. On most cattle farms, crabgrass makes a major contribution in furnishing high quality grazing. Crabgrass is truly a "little bit extra!"

Kudzu

Often considered a pest, this perennial legume from Japan and Korea is found on many farms covering old gullies and steep unusable land which was planted to kudzu as a soil conservation crop long ago. Today, kudzu often serves as a source of palatable high-quality grazing during droughts or as a supplement to perennial grasses as quality declines in late summer. Kudzu is undemanding, growing on acid soils low in phosphorus, rewarding the owner with high-protein digestible forage without any inputs of lime, fertilizer, insecticide, or herbicide. Although kudzu is not a big yielder, it grows where most other forage legumes will not grow and requires no maintenance. Livestock producers lucky enough to have kudzu planted on their property by someone long ago have a nice grazing supplement in summer.

Chickweed

This winter annual weed reseeds

naturally and grows in most pastures, making most of its production during late winter and early spring. Cattle like this palatable broadleaf weed which is no surprise since it is high in crude protein, 15 to 20%, and digestibility generally exceeds 70%. Chickweed makes a nice addition to nutritive quality of many perennial grass pastures with no cash inputs by the livestock producer. Some other winter weeds also have high quality but are often less palatable to cattle than chickweed.

Free nitrogen fertilizer

Volunteer annual white clover and/or hop clover (yellow flowers) often pops up everywhere in pastures without any planting being done. These clovers generally do not have a long productive season but they provide high-quality grazing in spring and fix atmospheric nitrogen, some of which becomes available to pasture grasses. Their nitrogen contribution to pastures is not high but often exceeds 50 lb N/acre which is quite a bargain since the livestock producer didn't spend anything on the clovers.

Another nitrogen "freebie" comes from bahiagrass. A nitrogen-fixing bacteria (different kind than in nodules on legume roots) lives in the roots of bahiagrass and fixes about 15 to 20 lb N/acre annually. This isn't much, but together with some free nitrogen from lightning in thunderstorms and some free-living nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the soil, a lot of bahiagrass pastures that never receive any nitrogen fertilizer continue to produce moderate amounts of grazing for livestock of their owners.

Lagnippe for livestock producers

Many livestock producers recognize the value of these and other "little bit extras" available to them. Take advantage of them, manage and encourage them to reduce costs. It is isn't often that cattle producers get something for nothing but there are a few available that the IRS can't touch!



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