

MARCH 2021

# TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

*Young County Agriculture and Natural Resources Newsletter*



## ***Young County Extension Office***

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AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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## **Impact of Subfreezing Temperatures on Warm-Season Perennial Grasses**

Warm-season perennial grasses are the basis of pasture systems and livestock production in Texas. The most prominent warm-season species are bermudagrass (seeded and hybrid) and bahiagrass. Neither of these species is native to the state of Texas but they are well adapted to Central and East Texas. Unfortunately, they can be greatly impacted by cold winter temperatures. Central and East Texas have seen record temperatures along with snow and ice in mid-February. Many may be concerned about whether or not their warm-season forages have survived these weather conditions. Bermudagrass and bahiagrass grow best when soil temperatures are above 70° F. These temperatures usually occur when the daytime air temperature reaches approximately 80° F. Night temperatures are usually a good indicator of soil surface temperatures. Warm-season grasses will not produce roots (rhizomes and stolons) unless the soil temperature exceeds 55° F for several weeks.

# Cont. Impact of Subfreezing Temps

As day length becomes shorter and temperature drop below 50° F, bermudagrass and bahiagrass cease shoot growth, lose chlorophyll, and begin nutrient translocation (carbohydrates, nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus) for storage in the below-ground tissue (rhizomes). Without proper plant nutrition, even the most winter hardy variety can succumb to winter kill or injury. Injured plants are slow to recover in the spring and after every grazing cycle or cut of hay.

As a warm-season grass, bermudagrass can be sensitive to winter damage in spite of dramatic genetic improvement to cold tolerance. Winter kill can be caused by a combination of factors. Winter kill is dependent on moisture, low temperature, and the duration of low temperatures. Low temperatures can be damaging when it occurs late in the winter or early spring and last up to a week to ten days.

The most susceptible sites for winter kill include ones that are: north-facing slopes; heavily shaded; poorly drained; poorly adapted cultivars; heavily trafficked during winter; substantial soil compacted, were newly sprigged or seeded last summer; and soils with deficient levels of phosphorus and potassium.

To reduce the risk of winter kill it is critical to follow best management practices during the active growing season. Those practices would include maintaining appropriate soil fertility especially potassium levels for bermudagrass. Potassium is essential in plants to combat diseases, aid in water use, and for winter hardiness. Deficiencies of potassium can cause both yield losses and stand losses. Bermudagrass is especially sensitive to potassium deficiencies.

Maintaining some substantial bermudagrass stubble height (>4") going into winter can be beneficial for the future growing season. Higher stubble height means a more substantial root structure to capture deeper soil moisture and nutrients. Maintaining a higher stubble height generally results in increased loading of rhizomes reserves and increases canopy insulation of crowns during the winter.


It is important to note that winter kill in warm-season perennial grasses is highly variable and difficult to estimate because it could be affected by genetics, temperature extremes, geographical location, soil drainage, nutrient management factors, and an endless combination of the factors that interact with each other to cause a highly variable impacted phenomenon.



# Cont. Impact of Sub Freezing Temps

Unfortunately, we won't know the true impact of this weather until bermudagrass greens up in the spring. For now, we can plan ahead for improving our forage management for this coming warm season. Using best management practices that encourage healthy stands, better nutrient utilization along with grazing management and hay production practices that extend the longevity of the stand is the producer's best line of defense.

What to look for and when to assess winter damage? While bermudagrass is still dormant, roots and rhizomes can be carefully dug up to determine if they are healthy or necrotic. Necrotic tissue will look dark and rotted while healthy roots and rhizomes will look white or tan and succulent. If they are healthy then continue to wait until green-up and active growth before applying any nitrogen fertilizer. Bermudagrass and bahiagrass will break dormancy after our last frost which can occur in mid-March. Green up will usually take place from late March to mid-April depending on location. If roots and rhizomes are necrotic, wait until late-April to mid-May before making a major re-planting decision. If you decide to re-plant, select forage species and varieties that are adapted to your location as well as fit your production system goals. See Publications for forage species and variety information. Bahiagrass is a prolific seed producer so even if you have lost a portion of your stand it will fill back in as seeds germinate throughout the summer. Remember, bermudagrass is resilient and has high tolerance of cold and drought if managed appropriately.



**Vanessa Corriher Olson**  
Professor, Forage Extension Specialist  
Soil & Crop Science Department  
Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRILIFE**  
EXTENSION

# YOUNG COUNTY AG DAY

**APRIL 27TH**

**YOUNG COUNTY ARENA**

**REGISTRATION: 8:30AM**

**PROGRAM: 9AM - 2PM**

*Keynote Speaker*

# Corbitt Wall



## Sponsors

**Young County Farm Bureau**

**Noon meal prepared by  
FMC Feeds and Supply**

**Contact the Extension Office to RSVP  
(Virtual Option will be Available)**

**For more information: 940.549.0737 /  
savanna.williams@ag.tamu.edu**

**3201 Hwy 16 South | Graham, Tx 76450**

## PROGRAM TOPICS

**OFFERING 3 CEU'S**

**\$10 REGISTRATION FEE**

### **MESQUITE CONTROL OPTIONS**

Dr. Megan Clayton - Texas A&M Agrilife  
Range Extension Range Specialist

### **EXTERNAL PARASITES IN BEEF CATTLE**

Dr. Sonja Swinger - Texas A&M Agrilife  
Extension Service Entomologist

### **LABELS AND LABELING - LAWS & REGS**

Brent Batchelor - Texas A&M Agrilife  
Extension Regional Program Leader

### **CONDITION OF THE CATTLE INDUSTRY**

Keynote Speaker - Corbitt Wall is a  
native of eastern New Mexico and west  
Texas. He is a fourth generation  
cattlemen and has been a livestock  
auctioneer for 25 years.



# USDA Offers Disaster Assistance for Producers Facing Inclement Weather

By Ciji Taylor, Public Affairs Specialist

Most of the nation is facing unusually cold weather, as a winter storm moved coast-to-coast over the weekend. Winter storms create significant challenges and often result in a catastrophic loss for agricultural producers, especially for those raising livestock, row crops, and vulnerable crops like citrus.

Despite every attempt to mitigate risk, your operation may suffer losses. USDA offers several programs to help with recovery.

## **Risk Management**

For producers who have risk protection through Federal Crop Insurance or the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), we want to remind you to report crop damage to your crop insurance agent or the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office.

If you have crop insurance, contact your agency within 72 hours of discovering the damage, and be sure to follow up in writing within 15 days. If you have NAP coverage, file a Notice of Loss (also called Form CCC-576) within 15 days of loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

## Disaster Assistance

USDA also offers disaster assistance programs, which is especially important to livestock, fruit and vegetable, specialty, and perennial crop producers who have fewer risk management options.

First, the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP) reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry, and

other animals that died as a result of a qualifying natural disaster event— like these winter storms – or for loss of grazing acres, feed, and forage.

Next, the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) provides cost-share assistance to rehabilitate and replant trees, vines, or shrubs' loss experienced by orchards and nurseries. This complements NAP or crop insurance coverage, which covers the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases.

For LIP and ELAP, you will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For TAP, you will need to file a program application within 90 days.



In Texas, producers are finding creative ways to get water to cattle, including melting ice with fire. Photo by Dee Ann Littlefield, NRCS.

## Documentation

It's critical to keep accurate records to document all losses following this devastating cold weather event. Livestock producers are advised to document beginning livestock numbers by taking the time and date-stamped video or pictures prior to after the loss.

Other common documentation options include:

- Purchase records
- Production records
- Vaccination records
- Bank or other loan documents
- Third-party certification
- Other Programs

The Emergency Conservation Program and Emergency Forest Restoration Program can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore damaged farmland or forests.

Additionally, FSA offers a variety of loans available including emergency loans that are triggered by disaster declarations and operating loans that can assist producers with credit needs. You can use these loans to replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, or refinance farm-related debts, and other needs.

Meanwhile, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial resources through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program to help with immediate needs and long-term support to help recover from natural disasters and conserve water resources. Assistance may also be available for emergency animal mortality disposal from natural disasters and other causes.

## Additional Resources

Additional details – including payment calculations – can be found on our NAP, ELAP, LIP, and TAP fact sheets. On farmers.gov, the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet, and Farm Loan Discovery Tool can help you determine program or loan options.

While we never want to have to implement disaster programs, we are here to help. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local USDA Service Center. All USDA Service Centers are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments because of the pandemic.