

## Winter Annuals Could Help with Hay Shortages

Livestock producers are facing a tough year. The late freeze in April and a dry summer have produced very little growth on summer pastures and hay fields. As a result we are faced with a desperate situation. There are hay shortages reported all across the state. A study done in North Carolina shows that there is a shortfall of 800,000+ hay rolls statewide.

The Farm Service Center in Murphy has received reports that the hay crop is less than half what is normally produced in Cherokee, Clay, and Graham counties. Farmers are faced with some hard decisions this fall and winter. Many do not have the hay to support the animals they currently own and will be forced to consider culling, downsizing, or selling out. One alternative that could help meet the hay shortfall this year is winter annuals.

Winter annuals grow well in cool conditions such as fall and winter. One such winter annual that has promise is Marshall Ryegrass. Marshall Ryegrass was developed and released in 1981. It has an excellent tolerance for cold and is particularly well suited to winter conditions. Many specialists rate it the most cold-tolerant variety on the market. Marshall Ryegrass has performed well in grazing tests throughout the south. Farmers in Cherokee, Clay and Graham have experimented Marshall Ryegrass with great success.

When trying to identify areas that could be utilized think about landscape position, slope, and fencing. Make sure the area you want to plant is a good site for planting and you can get over it with the tractor and grain drill. Ensure the area has adequate fencing. It will be necessary to exclude the animals until the grass gets established. Marshall Ryegrass should be planted in late August or early September. Planting rates are as follows: Broadcast 30-35 pounds per acre or Drill 20-25 pounds per acre. Drilling is the preferred method of seeding and should produce a denser stand. Yields for Marshall Ryegrass are approximately 4700 pounds per acre. A seed shortage is expected this fall for small grains and Marshall Ryegrass due to the spring freeze and other conditions. Therefore it would be advisable to purchase seed as soon as possible.

Other winter annuals (small grains) such as winter wheat, barley, rye, triticale have also been used to provide supplemental feed. These small grain grasses can't withstand the grazing pressure however they are cheaper to establish. A much better choice for a grazing operation will be Marshall Ryegrass. One limiting factor will be moisture. In the dry conditions we have been experiencing germination will be difficult. Have faith, take a step, and plant some Marshall Ryegrass. If we get the needed moisture, this would be a great year to have some extra feed.

There are several resource agencies available to provide technical assistance on planting annuals for forage production. Please feel free to give one of the following agencies a call. We are here to provide these services to you: Natural Resource Conservation Service and Cherokee County Soil and Water Conservation District (828) 837-6417 ext 3, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service (828) 837-2210, and North Carolina Department of Agriculture. The Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition a local nonprofit organization has a no-till grain drill that is available for rent at very low cost to farmers. The Coalition's number is (828) 837-5414.

*Written by:*

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