

2008 Summer Annual Grass Report

G.L. Olson, S.R. Smith, and G. D. Lacefield, UK Department of Plant and Soil Sciences

Introduction

Summer annual grasses provide an important forage crop option for producers in Kentucky. These grasses are mainly used as emergency or supplemental hay and pasture crops, but little information is available on their yield potential. The purpose of this publication is to summarize the University of Kentucky 2008 forage yield trials with sudangrass, sorghum/sudangrass, millets, and teff.

Sudangrass (*Sorghum bicolor ssp. drummondii*) and sudangrass hybrids are rapidly growing annual grasses of the sorghum family. They are medium yielding and well suited for grazing or hay because of their smaller stem size. They regrow quickly after harvest and can be grazed several times during summer and early fall.

Sorghum x sudangrass hybrids are more vigorous and higher yielding than sudangrass. A larger stem size makes these hybrids less useful for hay, therefore they are commonly used for baleage and grazing.

Pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*) is the most widely grown type of millet. It is well adapted to production systems characterized by drought, low soil fertility, and high temperature. It is higher yielding than foxtail millet and regrows after harvest if an 8- to 10-inch stubble height is left. Dwarf varieties, which are leafier and better suited for grazing, are available.

Foxtail (German) millet (*Setaria italica*) is shorter growing and finer stemmed than pearl millet. This makes it easier to harvest as hay. However, it is the lowest yielding of the summer annual grasses and will not regrow to produce another harvest. It is a good smother crop to be used before late summer no-till seeding of another forage crop such as fescue or alfalfa. It is also used in wildlife plantings to produce food and cover for doves, quail, and other birds.

Teff, also referred to as Summer Lovegrass (*Eragrostis tef*), is a warm season annual grass native to Ethiopia and has been used as a grain crop for thousands of years. Recently, there has been considerable interest in teff as a forage crop. It is high quality, palatable, and fine stemmed and therefore makes excellent hay.

Considerations in Selecting a Summer Annual Variety

The major factor in selecting a variety of summer annual grass is yield, both total and seasonal. Growth after first cutting is strongly dependent on available moisture and nitrogen fertilization. Summer annual grasses generally have different characteristics and uses. Pearl millets vary considerably in height and can be used for both pasture and hay. Pearl millet has the advantage of not having any prussic acid (HCN or cyanide) poisoning potential. Sudangrass and sorghum-sudangrass hybrids are related grasses (in the sorghum family) and have prussic acid or cyanide poisoning potential immediately after frost or when immature shoots are grazed during severe drought. Sudangrasses are considered to have the least potential for prussic acid poisoning. Sudangrass has smaller, finer stems than sorghum-sudangrass hybrids, which have finer stems than forage sorghums. Consequently, sudangrasses are more easily cured for hay. Pearl millets, sudangrass, sorghum-sudangrass, and teff are typically harvested multiple times during the growing season, and foxtail millet is harvested only once. For more detailed management recommendations refer to *Producing Summer Annual Grasses for Emergency or Supplemental Forage* (AGR-88), and *Teff*, which can be found at www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage under "Publications" in the "Grass" species.

Description of the Tests

This report summarizes studies at Lexington (one in 2007 and two in 2008) and Princeton (one in 2008). The soils at Lexington (Maury) and Princeton (Crider) are well drained silt loams and are well suited to annual grass production. Plots were 5 ft x 20 ft in a randomized complete block design with four replications with a harvested area of 5 ft x 20 ft. All trials were sown into a prepared seedbed using a disk drill at the following rates (pounds/acre): sudangrass (25), sorghum-sudangrass (30), pearl millet (20), foxtail millet (20), and teff (5 for uncoated, 8 for coated). Plots were harvested with a sickle-type forage plot harvester. Fresh weight samples were taken at each harvest to calculate percent dry matter production. All tests were managed for establishment, fertility, pest control, and harvest according to University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service recommendations. Pests were controlled so that they would not limit yield. Nitrogen was applied at 60 pounds per acre two weeks after planting and 30 pounds/acre immediately after the first harvest.

Results and Discussion

Weather data for Lexington and Princeton are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Yield data (on a dry matter basis) for all tests are reported in Tables 3 through 6. Varieties are listed in order from highest to lowest total production. Yields are given by cutting and as a total for the year. Statistical analyses were performed on all yield data to determine if the apparent differences are truly due to variety or just due to chance. Varieties not significantly different from the highest numerical value in a column are marked with one asterisk (*). To determine if two varieties are truly different, compare the difference between the two varieties to the Least Significant Difference (LSD) at the bottom of the column. If the difference

Table 1. Temperature and rainfall at Lexington, Kentucky in 2007 and 2008.

	2007				2008			
	Temperature		Rainfall		Temperature		Rainfall	
	°F	DEP ¹	IN	DEP	°F	DEP	IN	DEP
JAN	37	+6	2.93	+0.07	33	+2	4.60	+1.74
FEB	27	-8	1.83	-1.38	36	+1	5.37	+2.16
MAR	52	+8	1.97	-2.43	45	+1	6.28	+1.88
APR	53	-2	3.87	-0.01	55	0	5.72	+1.84
MAY	68	+4	1.45	-3.02	62	-2	4.88	+0.41
JUN	74	+2	1.77	-1.89	74	+2	3.30	-0.36
JUL	74	-2	6.90	+1.90	76	0	2.54	-2.46
AUG	80	+5	2.56	-1.37	75	0	1.08	-2.85
SEP	72	+4	1.15	-2.05	72	+4	1.21	-1.99
OCT	63	+6	5.28	+2.71	57	0	1.35	-1.22
NOV	46	+1	2.86	-0.53	43	-2	2.28	-1.11
DEC	40	+4	5.29	+1.31	36	0	4.76	+0.78
Total			37.86	-6.69			43.37	-1.18

¹ DEP is departure from the long-term average.

Table 2. Temperature and rainfall at Princeton, Kentucky in 2008.

	2008			
	Temperature		Rainfall	
	°F	DEP ¹	IN	DEP
JAN	37	+3	2.40	-1.40
FEB	39	+1	6.76	+2.33
MAR	48	+1	7.55	+2.61
APR	58	-1	6.56	+1.76
MAY	65	-2	6.19	+1.23
JUN	78	+3	1.24	-2.61
JUL	79	+1	5.12	+0.83
AUG	77	0	0.69	-3.32
SEP	74	+3	0.61	-2.72
OCT	60	+1	2.25	-0.80
NOV	46	-1	2.59	-2.04
DEC	39	0	6.99	+1.95
Total			48.95	-2.18

¹ DEP is departure from the long-term average.

Table 3. Dry matter yields, plant height and maturity of summer annuals sown May 1, 2007 at Lexington, Kentucky.

Variety	Type	Proprietor/ Distributor	Plant height (in)			Maturity ¹	2007 Yield (tons/acre)			
			Jul 11	Aug 17	Oct 2		Jul 11	Aug 17	Oct 2	Total
Monarch V	Sudangrass	Public	60.0	57.0	30.8	62.0	1.51	1.58	1.08	4.17*
Special Effort	Sorghun-Sudan	Cisco	64.5	52.5	34.5	59.0	1.42	1.48	1.19	4.09*
ProMax	Sudangrass	Ampac Seed	67.5	61.5	32.3	63.0	1.54	1.44	0.79	3.76*
NutraPlus	Sorghun-Sudan	Cisco	57.0	40.5	31.5	53.3	1.25	0.97	0.87	3.09
Dessie	Teff	Turner Seed	19.0	19.3	16.0	59.0	0.89	1.54	0.64	3.07
Tiffany	Teff	Target Seed	16.0	20.0	14.5	52.5	0.90	1.41	0.51	2.82
Common Pearl	Pearl millet	---	19.5	35.3	19.3	31.8	0.47	0.95	0.59	2.01
Common Foxtail	Foxtail (German) millet	---	23.8	---	---	75.5	1.29	---	---	1.29
Mean			42.1	41.1	26.1	57.6	1.06	1.09	0.66	2.81
CV,%			14.7	11.3	11.5	4.9	18.82	25.95	22.33	14.79
LSD, 0.05			9.0	6.8	4.4	4.1	0.29	0.41	0.21	0.60

¹ Maturity rating scale: 37=flag leaf emergence, 45=boot swollen, 50=beginning of inflorescence emergence, 58=complete emergence of inflorescence, 62=beginning of pollen shed.

*Not significantly different from the highest numerical value in the column, based on the 0.05 LSD.
 May-September rainfall was 13.83 inches; rainfall deficit during this period in 2007 was -6.43 inches.
 Pearl millet had a poor stand.
 Foxtail millet is a one cut crop.

Table 4. Dry matter yields, height and maturity of sudangrass and sorghum-sudangrass varieties sown May 29, 2008 at Lexington, Kentucky.

Variety	Type	Proprietor/ Distributor	Height (inches)		Maturity ¹		2008 Yield (tons/acre)			
			Jul 10	Aug 13	Jul 10	Aug 13	Jul 10	Aug 13	Sep 26	Total
Special Effort	Sorghum-Sudan	Cisco	39	51	31	50	1.39	0.61	0.65	2.66*
NutraPlus	Sorghum-Sudan	Cisco	33	48	32	49	1.47	0.60	0.52	2.59*
HyGain	Sorghum-Sudan	Turner Seed	39	51	32	46	1.30	0.65	0.59	2.54*
Hayking	Sudangrass	Central Farm	40	56	33	50	1.37	0.54	0.48	2.40
Monarch V	Sudangrass	Public	39	47	33	45	1.28	0.58	0.38	2.24
ProMax	Sudangrass	Ampac Seed	40	54	33	48	1.18	0.46	0.39	2.04
SurpassBMR-6	Sorghum-Sudan	Turner Seed	24	40	30	52	1.25	0.39	0.36	1.99
Piper	Sudangrass	Public	40	54	33	48	1.13	0.51	0.29	1.93
Mean			36.5	50.1	32.2	48.4	1.30	0.54	0.46	2.30
CV,%			7.1	5.4	1.7	7.3	9.81	13.32	21.27	7.79
LSD, 0.05			3.8	4.0	0.8	5.2	0.19	0.11	0.14	0.26

¹ Maturity rating scale: 37=flag leaf emergence, 45=boot swollen, 50=beginning of inflorescence emergence, 58=complete emergence of inflorescence, 62=beginning of pollen shed.

*Not significantly different from the highest numerical value in the column, based on the 0.05 LSD.
 June-September rainfall was 8.13 inches; rainfall deficit during this period in 2008 was -7.66 inches.

is equal to or greater than the LSD, the varieties are truly different when grown under the conditions at a given location. The Coefficient of Variation (CV), which is a measure of the variability of the data, is included for each column of means. Low variability is desirable and increased variability within a study results in higher CVs and larger LSDs.

Summary

Summer annual grasses can be an important supplemental source of pasture, hay, and silage in Kentucky. Varieties should be selected for their seasonal and total yield characteristics and for their suitability for the method of harvest to be employed (pasture, hay, or silage). Make sure seed of the chosen variety is properly labeled and will be available when needed.

Table 5. Dry matter yields and maturity of teff varieties sown May 29, 2008 at Lexington, Kentucky (fertilizer application and rainfall deficit at bottom of table).

Variety	Maturity ¹		Yield (tons/acre)				Total
	Jul 15	Aug 13	Jul 15	Aug 13	Sept 26	Oct 28	
Rooiberg	87	0.34	0.56	0.77	0.17	1.83*	
Excaliber	73	0.39	0.54	0.70	0.15	1.78*	
Pharaoh	56	0.44	0.37	0.79	0.12	1.73*	
Tiffany	62	0.24	0.40	0.88	0.15	1.68*	
Highveld	67	0.25	0.50	0.70	0.19	1.64*	
HorseCandi	70	0.28	0.41	0.80	0.14	1.63*	
Dessie	72	0.31	0.48	0.73	0.11	1.63*	
Witkope	81	0.34	0.44	0.66	0.09	1.53*	
Corvallis	68	0.17	0.36	0.63	0.17	1.33	
Mean	70.6	0.31	0.45	0.74	0.14	1.64	
CV,%	10.5	41.81	17.53	18.85	47.98	17.45	
LSD, 0.05	10.8	0.19	0.12	0.20	0.10	0.42	

¹ Maturity rating scale: 37=flag leaf emergence, 45=boot swollen, 50=beginning of inflorescence emergence, 58=complete emergence of inflorescence, 62=beginning of pollen shed.
 *Not significantly different from the highest numerical value in the column, based on the 0.05 LSD.
 Application of 60# of N on June 13 and 30# of N on July 17.
 June-October rainfall was 9.48 inches; rainfall deficit during this period in 2008 was -8.88 inches.
 Check with local dealer for available varieties.

Table 6. Dry matter yields and maturity of teff varieties sown June 4, 2008 at Princeton, Kentucky (fertilizer application and rainfall deficit at bottom of table).

Variety	Maturity ¹		Yield (tons/acre)				Total
	Jul 29	Aug 28	Jul 29	Aug 28	Oct 3	Oct 30	
Highveld	56	55	1.58	1.05	0.67	0.14	3.44*
Excaliber	56	56	1.75	1.01	0.53	0.10	3.38*
Tiffany	49	49	1.62	0.90	0.47	0.17	3.17*
Rooiberg	57	58	1.44	0.96	0.58	0.17	3.15*
Dessie	56	51	1.67	0.93	0.44	0.10	3.15*
Pharaoh	55	52	1.40	0.93	0.53	0.08	2.94*
Witkope	57	57	1.51	0.86	0.39	0.15	2.90*
Corvallis	56	52	1.57	0.85	0.39	0.09	2.90*
HorseCandi	54	52	1.40	0.87	0.41	0.14	2.83
Mean	54.8	53.5	1.55	0.93	0.49	0.13	3.10
CV,%	5.9	3.8	17.34	13.43	27.01	53.37	12.20
LSD, 0.05	4.7	3.0	0.39	0.18	0.16	0.10	0.55

¹ Maturity rating scale: 37=flag leaf emergence, 45=boot swollen, 50=beginning of inflorescence emergence, 58=complete emergence of inflorescence, 62=beginning of pollen shed.
 *Not significantly different from the highest numerical value in the column, based on the 0.05 LSD.
 Application of 60# of N on June 4 and 30# of N on July 30.
 June-October rainfall was 9.87 inches; rainfall deficit during this period in 2008 was -8.66 inches.
 Check with local dealer for available varieties.

Mention or display of a trademark, proprietary product, or firm in text or figures does not constitute an endorsement and does not imply approval to the exclusion of other suitable products or firms.