

Conservation Conversation



Old World Bluestem, Good or Bad? By Carl Jarboe, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician

I always dislike an answer like I'm about to give, "it depends". My questions that follows is always, "depends on what?" Maybe in this article I can answer with some information that will help you decide how you feel about this plant.

K-State University has done some research on controlling this plant after it's introduced. Go on-line to <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/stories/2016/05/oldworldbluestem051816.html> or <https://www.lyon.k-state.edu/docs/ag/Fick%20-%20Emporia%20ID%20and%20Control%20OWB.pdf>. Both articles are about old-world bluestem, where it came from, how it spreads, palatability and how to remove it from native grass stands.

Old-world bluestem was brought to the US to provide a grass that would grow in poor soils and survive drought conditions. It fulfills both of those issues. The part that is of concern, and may have been over looked early on, is how fast it spreads or invades native grass pastures and range sites.

Does it need removed? If you have native range old-world bluestem is an issue due to its invasive tendencies. Your native grasses are much more palatable most of the year so the livestock will focus on them and not graze the old-world. This allows for more and more encroachment by the old-world. By following the recommendations for control in the articles mentioned above you can at least slow down its spread in your native range sites. Elimination may not be possible.

Will livestock eat it? Yes, when it's a mono culture they will eat it readily especially if it's grazed hard and has new growth coming on constantly. Do they like it? That's harder to know, I'm told the gains on old-world are good, especially if you fertilize it. I have also been told that the hay is readily consumed by livestock when fed. The two pervious comments may have you asking, why would I be concerned.

When you have old-world in your pasture the one thing that is constant is that livestock will not eat it in the late summer or fall unless it's their only choice. They may eat some in passing but do not focus on it in late summer or fall. It would be like going to your next meal and the only food is a vegetable; you would eat it if it was the only choice but if you had a choice you might choose something to go with it or instead of. Cattle will focus on native grasses and forbs where they get more nutrition. I've been in many pastures in the late summer or fall and heard comments about the old world, look how much it grew this year. I then ask, where your cows are. The answer is they are in the native grass over the hill, not eating the old world. Most producers are quick to add but the cows love it in the spring time. That is much like talking to someone about Little Bluestem, the red grass. We see so much of it in the fall. It appears cattle do not graze it at all however the truth is that cattle love it in the spring and incidentally graze it the rest of the year like old-world.

I've been told many times that we need to manage for what we want, not what we don't want. Changing your grazing to utilize the old-world, if you have it, and maybe work on setting it back as suggested in the articles may be a good choice. Much like changing the way we graze to help reduce Little Blue and encourage other native species. Be careful when feeding hay if you do not know where it came from. Please, don't feed old-world hay in native range pastures. If you feed old-world hay, try to feed in one area where you may be able to manage the grazing of it as well in the following years. Better yet, don't feed old-world hay in your native range pasture at all.

Is Old-World Bluestem Good or Bad? That depends on your management.

Board of Supervisors

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The Barber County Conservation District regular board meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month.

Office Closings:

October 14: Columbus Day
November 11: Veteran's Day
November 28: Thanksgiving Day
December 25: Christmas Day
January 1: New Year's Day

Plant I.D. & Grazing Management Field Days - Lody Black, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist

If you haven't heard already, with collaboration of many supporters, NRCS held an event in August and in September to cover a couple topics on Grazing Management and a Plant ID segment. The August event was held in Comanche County, while the September event was held in Western Barber County.

At the event in August, Carl Jarboe covered some topics that related to Soil Health, in which the presence of dung beetles was discussed. The landowner had changed the parasite regime some, allowing for an increase in these beetles. The range site we were on also had some trailing so, we talked about that and ways we could potentially fix these or avoid getting very deep trails and what effects that would have on soil health.

The next topic was the grazing stick, which is what I covered. We looked at how we can measure grass and come up with a rough estimate of available forage. It was shown that the grazing stick has a step by step process of figuring your forage. We discussed a couple other monitoring techniques that we use here at NRCS and opened discussion up to the group if they had any thoughts or opinions on how they monitor their grass.

The final thing we did was split into two groups to identify plants present on this site. We had a wide variety of species present. Carl and I discussed some hypothesis on why the Mares tail were so prominent on the site for the year. No real weeds of concern were present in the area we were at, so we asked the group about plants they are currently having issues with discussed some techniques or thoughts on how to control certain things, or if they needed to be controlled at all!

There weren't as many participants at the September event, but we had another good afternoon of discussion. The format was very similar to the one in August. Carl touched on soil health and the lack of dung beetles due to different type of parasite regime. I discussed the grazing stick again and gave a quick demonstration of grazing stick use on this site. Then we did some plant identification and discussed the ones that were not as familiar, or that were prevalent and of some concern to participants.

Annual Broomweed and Mares tail were the biggest species of concern for the crowd, so we talked again about the reasons why the Mares tail was there. Then we talked more extensively on the Broomweed, as it has really started to make its presence known in the last month or so. The ranch manager was there to talk on some tree mulching that had occurred in the area where we were standing and discussed how that could play a role in what plants we were seeing. We looked at grazed versus ungrazed plants and how those grazed plants will respond.



Annual Broom Weed
Gutierrezia dracunculoides

The hope and goal of these events are to be informal and educational. I hope you can make plans to attend our next event on October 10th. Look for flyers to be sent out via email, information on the Barber County Conservation District Facebook page, and flyers will be available at the office. We hope to do another event like these following in Harper County. So, if you are unable to attend the one in October feel free to come out to the November event in Harper County. As always, if you have any questions feel free to contact us here at the office.



Mares tail
Conyza canadensis

Seeking Nominations for KS Bankers Conservation Award

Each year since 1950 the Barber County Bankers Association has recognized a producer who has shown outstanding conservation efforts with the Bankers Conservation Awards. The purpose of the program is to stimulate a greater interest in the conservation of Kansas agricultural resources by giving recognition to those farmers and landowners who have made outstanding progress in soil and water conservation on their farms.

Points to be considered in selecting soil conservation award winners include: (1) use of land according to its capabilities; (2) completeness of an applied farm plan; (3) balance of farm enterprise; (4) quality of conservation work and maintenance of practices; and (5) special practices unique to the farming operation.

The windbreak award considers windbreaks which provide protection from damaging winds for residential areas (or other structures), livestock or fields. Windbreaks need to be at least three years old. Points to be considered in selecting award winners include windbreak design, management, location, density and length.

Last year 199 Kansas producers and landowners were recognized through this program. Anyone owning or operating land in Barber County is eligible for these awards. If you know of someone you feel has done an outstanding job in the area of conservation, you can nominate that person by contacting Justin Goodno at the Barber County Extension office.

Seeding Native Grass With The Best Chance Of Success...Not Hard, Just Takes Some Planning

Often, we have landowners come into the office asking about seeding native grass at a time of year that success would be limited. Timing and preparation are key to success.

NRCS guide lines require seeding of native warm season grass between December 1st and May 15th. Using a grass drill is the best way to seed. A drill with double disk openers and press wheels assures that most of the seed will be in contact with soil. Broadcasting seed is the last resort due to the varied application rate. Dragging the areas seeded in that fashion with a harrow can help cover seed however without the press wheels to pack soil around the seed it may not stay covered. Broadcasting requires that much more seed be applied, usually doubling the amount of drilling to compensate for seed not being covered and losses due to erosion, birds, varmints, etc. Dormant seeding in the winter can work well. It allows for frost heave to help cover seed and get good seed to soil contact—seed is in the ground and ready to go in the spring when temperatures are right for germination. Spring seeding between March and May 15th are good as well. Spring seeding can be harder to pull off due to moisture and other farming operations that occur at the same time.

What time of year is best? The very best timing is when you have time. I have noticed that many landowners have a little more time in the fall or early winter to get the seeding completed. Many times as spring field work takes off it is hard to find time to get the grass seeding completed.

Preparation is important too. Bare ground seedings have less success than seeding into a cover of some sort. Grain stalks or stubble are the very best followed by wheat stubble as choices for covers. This may require some planning on your part to have grain crop residue left in the field to drill into.

The Barber County Conservation District sells native grass seed and can have special mixes prepared to suit the soil type you are planting in. We also have two grass drills that we rent out for native grass seeding. We do not allow old-world bluestem to be planted with our drills due to the risk of seed carry over getting planted in the neighbor's field.

Success requires some planning—best cover to drill into, timing for you to get the seed in the ground, using a grass drill. Planting good quality seed with the right mix for your situation is important as well.

The Barber County Conservation District Board of Supervisors has made the decision not to sell Old World Bluestem (OWB) grass seed due to its invasive nature nor to rent District owned grass drills to plant OWB.

Until we meet again.

I wanted to take a moment to let everyone know how much I have enjoyed working and living in Barber County. I have accepted a position in Morris County. Mariann and I will be moving to Council Grove this October. It is a move that allows Mariann and I to get closer to our families and aging mothers.

The District staff and board, FSA staff and of course the NRCS staff have been great to work with. I think this office is one of the best in the state.

I have met many producers across the three counties we serve. Everyone I have worked with has treated me with respect. I hope I have followed suit and they feel the same way about dealing with me. Many contractors have taught me better ways of doing things from dirt work to pipeline and solar installations, for this I will forever be grateful.

I truly feel like I'm better for having lived and worked in this community. I will be back on occasion, I hope to cross paths with many of you in the future.

Thanks

Carl Jarboe, Soil Conservation Technician

