N.C. Cooperative Extension

Wake County Center

Livestock News

April 2026

Inside This Issue

1 Important Information
2 Animal Waste Updates
3 Turning New Land Into Green Pastures
4 Don't Keep Her Another Year
5 The Vital Role of Nutrition in Sheep & Goat Success
6 Preparing Horse Pastures for Spring
7 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

Contact Us

N.C. Cooperative Extension
Wake County Center
4001 Carya Drive, Suite E
Raleigh, NC 27610
(919) 250-3803
wake.ces.ncsu.edu

Kimberly Webb, PhD
Extension Agent, Agriculture
kmwebb4@ncsu.edu

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NC State Extension works in tandem with N.C. A&T State University, as well as federal, state and local governments, to form a strategic partnership known as N.C. Cooperative Extension.

Upcoming Events

Wake County Cattlemen's Interest Meeting & Listening Session

Calling all Wake County beef cattle producers!

Join us for an interest and listening session as we seek to reorganize our timely county Cattlemen's meetings.

We're asking for your help in identifying your most pressing needs and topics of concern that you would like Cooperative Extension to work on.

April 22nd, 2026
6pm to 8pm

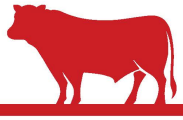
Ag. Services Building
4001 Carya Drive, Raleigh

Scan the QR code to register for free!

Or Visit:
go.ncsu.edu/wakecattlemans26session

Registration closes April 17th & space is limited. Sign up now!

Dinner will be provided.



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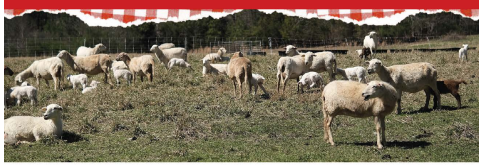
NC Cooperative Extension
Sheep & Goat 101: From Pasture to Possibility



Join us for an informative session designed for new and beginning farmers interested in raising sheep and goats. Learn the essentials of getting started and building a successful operation.

May 9th, 2026
9 am to 12 pm

1006 Eastern Avenue, Nashville, NC

Scan the QR code to register for free!

Or Visit:
https://go.ncsu.edu/sheep-goat-2026

Learn About:
- Common sheep and goat breeds in North Carolina
- Meat, milk, and fiber markets
- Basic infrastructure, supplies, and fencing
- Feeding, nutrition, and pasture management

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Workshop: Alfalfa Production in North Carolina

May 6, 2026; 11:30 am to 5:00 pm
Coats Community Building, 127 S Mckinley Street, Coats, NC, 27521

Forage & Grassland Management

What you will learn:

The workshop will focus on producing high-quality alfalfa for the North Carolina horse industry, highlighting practical, proven management strategies used by successful hay producers across the state.

Presentations will be followed by a producer panel featuring local Southeast Hay Contest winners, and a field tour showcasing hybrid bermudagrass, orchardgrass, timothy, alfalfa, and alfalfa–bermudagrass mixtures.

$10 registration cost (lunch included). Registration details will follow soon.

For questions about registration, contact: braudal@ncsu.edu.

For questions about the program contact your livestock county extension agent from Harnett, Jonhston, Lee, Moore, Wake and Sampson counties.

For any meeting listed, persons with disabilities may request accommodations to participate by contacting the Extension Office where the meeting will be held by phone, email, or in person at least 7 days prior to the event.

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Animal Waste Updates

By: Kaelyn Mohrfeld Livestock with N.C. Cooperative Extension in Lenoir & Greene Counties

1. Upcoming Initial 10-hour Animal Waste Operator Classes (OIC)
   There will be an initial class on April 22nd and 23rd in Wayne County. Participants will be able to take the June exam. To sign up, call 919-731-1521or email stefani_sykes@ncsu.edu.

2. Save the Date for upcoming Initial 10-hour Animal Waste Operator Classes (OIC)
   - July 13th and 14th in Lenoir County
   - October 7th and 8th in Duplin County

3. The Agronomic Services Division received final approval for increases in lab fees. The new fees foe soil and waste samples are listed below.

Soil Testing: Important Notice

A $5 Peak Season soil test fee was approved to take effect on March 2, 2026. To accommodate grower needs, the Agronomic Division will delay implementation until Fall 2026.

Service	Fee
Soil Testing (April 1 – November 30)*	$0
Soil Testing (*December 1 – March 31)	$5

Please note that we are keeping the soil testing peak season fee of $4 per sample for the remainder of this season which ends March 31. The new peak season fee of $5 per sample will take effect in the fall of 2026.

Waste / Compost Analysis

Service	Fee
Waste/Compost Analysis	$15
NH_4/NO_3	$15
Calcium Carbonate Equivalent	$10
Heavy metals	$40
Molybdenum	$5

Reminders
- Lagoon analysis is required 60 days before or after applying animal waste. Set reminders on your phone or calendar to take them in a timely manner.
- Sludge surveys are due yearly by 12/31 unless you received an extension.
- Check if your calibration (due every other year for general permits) and soil samples (due every 3 years) are due this year by 12/31.

Check your animal waste continuing credit hours and due date.

Turning New Land into Green Pastures

By: Liz Joseph Livestock & Field Crops Agent with N.C. Cooperative Extension in Moore County

More and more people are purchasing cutover land, intending to convert it into pasture to raise livestock. Cutover land is forestland that has been harvested of all marketable timber. This land is enticing because it is often less expensive than already established pasture or farmland. One thing to keep in mind is the importance of proper land preparation prior to planting your permanent pasture grass. Converting cutover land into a productive pasture is a large undertaking that takes time and money. Landowners should be conscious of the time it takes to properly prepare cutover land for permanent pastures.

The first step is often the biggest hurdle, removal of the remains from the timber harvest, which usually includes branches, sticks, roots, stumps, and possibly unmarketable trees. This will require equipment that can be rented and done on your own or you can hire someone to help complete this step. Stumps can be mulched or removed with a bulldozer or excavator. If stumps are not completely removed, over time, holes can develop as the stump and roots left begin to decompose. After stump removal, a root rake can be used to create piles of the remaining material to be burned. Using a forestry mulcher is also an option and can help add organic material to the soil, which can be beneficial, especially in sandy soils.

After the remaining tree material has been burned and/or mulched, tillage, such as discing, should be utilized to smooth out the land. This step may need to be done a few times to remove any ruts or ridges that you wouldn't want in your pasture. At this point, it is recommended to take soil samples to get an idea of what the soil lacks in plant nutrients. We often see land that was used for tree production has a low soil pH and lacks the essential nutrients needed for grass production, especially phosphorus. After receiving the soil sample results, any necessary amendments, such as fertilizer and lime, can be incorporated.

Most of the time, the soil pH in cutover land is well below the optimal needed for grass establishment. It can take several months after lime application for the soil pH to change. If the soil pH is too low (or too high), it will not allow the plants to uptake nutrients, which will impact establishment. Phosphorus is critical in root development and is also typically below the optimal level for pasture establishment in cutover land.

After lime and other amendments are added, depending on the time of year, summer annuals or winter annuals can be planted. Using annuals before planting your permanent grass allows the lime to react and raise the soil pH, build soil fertility, and suppress weeds. Pearl millet or sorghum/sudan grass can be planted in late spring to early summer. Pearl millet does well on newly prepared ground. In the fall, cereal rye or another small grain can be planted. Avoid annual ryegrass, especially if you plan to plant a warm-season perennial like bermudagrass. Other annuals can be used specifically for building your soil.

Bermudagrass is our predominant warm-season perennial grass and fescue is our predominant cool-season perennial grass for this area. Bermudagrass should be established in the spring and can be established from seed or sprigs (live plant parts). Fescue is established in the fall from seed. There are several varieties of each type of grass. Consult with your Livestock Agent to determine the best one for your farm. Soil samples should be re-taken 3-6 months before you plan to plant your permanent grass to see where nutrient levels and soil pH are and apply any additional amendments, like potassium and nitrogen. During this process it would be ideal to not have any livestock on the property until your permanent grass is well established. Most fencing should be delayed until after large equipment is no longer needed for ease of moving around. If you have any questions about pasture establishment or forage management please contact your local Livestock Agent.

Don’t Keep Her Another Year: Rules That Drive Profit

By: Aaron Blackmon, Livestock Extension Agent with N.C. Cooperative Extension in Columbus County

Culling is one of the most powerful profit tools in a beef cow-calf operation. Too often, commercial producers keep cows too long out of habit or sentiment. Research and Extension guidance consistently show that disciplined, data-driven culling improves herd fertility, lowers costs, and increases pounds of calf weaned. A simple rule should guide every decision: **Every Cow Must Generate Enough Revenue Each Year to Cover Her Annual Cost.**

Identification and Records: The Foundation of Good Culling

Before any effective culling program can work, producers must be able to identify animals and track performance. Even in commercial herds, some form of permanent identification, such as ear tags, tattoos, or electronic ID, is essential. Without it, it is nearly impossible to know which cows are paying their way.

Good record keeping allows producers to track pregnancy status, calving dates, calf weaning weights, body condition scores, and structural problems over time. Herds using performance records make more profitable culling decisions than herds that rely on memory or visual appraisal alone. Records do not have to be complicated, but they must be consistent and accurate.

Start with Reproductive Performance

The first and most important culling rule is reproductive success. Open cows, cows that lost their calf, or cows that fail to wean a calf should be marketed. Extension recommendations emphasize that non-pregnant cows or cows that lost calves are non-productive and should be culled.

If a cow has a calf but loses it, she did not produce saleable pounds that year. From an economic standpoint, she must either: A) Wean a marketable calf, or B) Be sold herself to generate revenue.

With slaughter cow markets historically strong, carrying a non-productive female another year usually adds cost without return. The goal of a commercial cow is simple: **wean a calf every year.**

Use Body Condition Score (BCS) as a Management Tool

Body condition scoring is a proven indicator of reproductive success and profitability. Cows should ideally calve in **BCS 5–7** for optimal fertility. Poor body condition is linked to longer time to return to estrus, lower milk production, reduced weaning weights, and lower income per cow. Cows that consistently fall below acceptable condition despite adequate nutrition should be considered for culling, as they often struggle to maintain yearly production. Udder scoring should be part of routine evaluation. Removing structurally unsound females improves both labor efficiency and calf performance.

Measure Production: Pounds Weaned per Cow

Top commercial herds focus on **percent weaning weight relative to cow size**. Larger cows must wean proportionally heavier calves to remain profitable. Selection pressure on pounds weaned improves lifetime productivity and herd efficiency. A good, efficient target is for a cow to wean a calf weighing **50-60%** of her own body weight. Larger cows (1400lbs+) will struggle to reach this goal.

Align Culling with Genetic Goals

Culling is selection in reverse. Each removal shapes the future cow herd. Commercial herds should define clear genetic goals such as moderate mature cow size, fertility and longevity, calving ease, and growth performance. Replacement heifers should come from the most productive, problem-free cows that consistently wean a calf.

Understand Cow Depreciation and Age

Every cow has a productive lifespan. Reproductive performance typically peaks in middle age and declines in older cows. Producers should monitor mouth condition, structural soundness, pregnancy history, and lifetime productivity. Older cows must continue to earn their keep. Age alone is not the problem; lack of production is.

Make the Hard Call

In today’s market, feed, pasture, and labor are too expensive to carry passengers. If a cow does not wean a calf, she must generate income another way, usually through the cull market. **Bottom line:** A profitable commercial cow should breed back on time, maintain adequate body condition, stay structurally sound, and raise a quality calf every year. With good identification, solid records, and strict culling guidelines, producers can build a more fertile, efficient, and profitable cow herd. I’ll close this article with one of my favorite phrases, "Take care of the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves".

The Vital Role of Nutrition in Sheep & Goat Success

By: Taylor Chavis, Livestock Agent with N.C. Cooperative Extension in Robeson County

While there are many different factors that contribute to the success of raising sheep and goats, nutrition is undoubtedly one of the most critical. Nutrition serves as the primary economic driving force for your farm because it directly impacts reproductive success, which encompasses everything from initial fertility and embryo survival to litter size and the rebreeding interval, or the amount of time it takes for a doe or ewe to get pregnant again. Proper nutrition also ensures lamb and kid vigor—the "get up and go" of the animal after birth—which is a direct result of the mother's late-gestation diet. It also influences market weights, as high-quality milk production leads to heavier weaning weights, while post-weaning nutrition determines how fast your livestock reaches market size. Finally, a well-fed animal has a robust immune system, making it far more resistant to the constant threats of diseases and parasites.

When evaluating any feed or forage, you should look at it through the lens of three main categories**: protein, energy, and minerals. Protein** is the building block or the "brick and mortar" for growth, building muscle and the skeletal framework. **Energy**, or Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN), is the fuel that gives animals the ability to perform bodily functions, including everything from walking and grazing to producing milk. If protein builds the car, TDN is the gasoline. **Minerals** are elements found in the soil and feed that are essential for body functions. Mineral levels in your forage are highly dependent on your soil composition, fertilizer use, and even the plant species itself. Because different plants "mine" minerals from the earth at different rates, a diverse pasture often provides a better mineral profile than a single plant species.

Nutritional needs fluctuate based on the animal's life stage, as seen in specific requirements for different species. For goats, a dry doe weighing 110 lbs. needs about 10% protein and 55% TDN, but once she reaches late pregnancy, those needs jump to 11% protein and 60% TDN. If she is a "high milk" producer, her protein needs can spike even further to 14%. Sheep requirements follow a similar upward trajectory as they move through different production stages. A dry ewe weighing 154 lbs. requires roughly 9.6% protein and 58% TDN, but these needs increase significantly during late pregnancy to 11.2% protein and 67% TDN. The demand peaks during lactation; a ewe nursing a single lamb requires 13.3% protein, while one nursing twins needs 14.8% protein to sustain milk production. Growing lambs also have high requirements, with early weaned lambs weighing 66 lbs. needing 14.5% protein and a high energy level of 76% TDN to maintain their growth rate.

Effective pasture management also requires an understanding of the natural grazing behaviors of each species. Sheep are true grazers that eat close to the ground and prefer a diet consisting of 60% grass. Conversely, goats are "top-down" grazers and natural browsers who prefer to eat the tops of the pasture canopy and woody plants, with browse making up 60% of their diet. Because of these differences, a smart strategy for pasture use involves grouping animals by their nutritional needs and giving those with the highest requirements, such as young growing animals and lactating females, access to the best quality pastures first.

Beyond solid feed, water remains a critical but often overlooked nutrient, as sheep and goats require between one and four gallons daily depending on factors like lactation status, temperature, and whether they are consuming lush green pasture or dry hay.

By aligning animal requirements with the quality of available forage and understanding species-specific grazing behaviors, producers can develop a more efficient and profitable operation. Balancing these nutritional needs with strategic pasture management ensures that the highest-need animals—such as growing young and lactating females—receive the best quality nutrients. Ultimately, prioritizing nutrition alongside other management factors is the key to maintaining a healthy, productive, and resilient flock or herd.

Preparing Horse Pastures for Spring

By: Emi Bigford Livestock Agent with N.C. Cooperative Extension in Montgomery County

As winter ends, spring pasture management becomes a priority for horse owners across North Carolina. Early-season management sets the foundation for healthy forage, sound soils, and safe grazing throughout the year. Taking time in late winter and early spring to assess pasture conditions and plan management practices can help protect grass stands, reduce weed pressure, and support overall horse health.

Begin by walking pastures to evaluate winter damage. Look for bare or thin areas, soil compaction, erosion, and muddy spots caused by rainfall or livestock traffic. Identifying and addressing these areas early helps prevent further deterioration once grasses begin active growth. Remove debris such as branches, rocks, and trash to reduce the risk of injury and allow for easier mowing and maintenance. Fence lines and gates should also be inspected and repaired prior to spring turnout.

Turnout timing is critical in early spring. Wet soils are highly susceptible to compaction, and young forage plants can be damaged easily. Horses should not be turned out until grasses reach approximately six to eight inches in height. This allows forage plants to develop adequate leaf area and root systems to tolerate grazing pressure. Horses should be introduced to pasture gradually to prevent overgrazing and encourage uniform forage growth. Turning horses out too early often results in selective grazing, weakened forage stands, and increased weed pressure.

Soil testing is one of the most effective tools for pasture management and should be conducted in late winter or early spring. Soil test results provide information on soil pH and nutrient levels and guide lime and fertilizer applications. Applying lime and fertilizer according to recommendations improves forage productivity while minimizing unnecessary expense and environmental risk. When fertilizer is needed, split applications can help promote steady growth rather than excessive, weak forage. Maintaining soil health also supports beneficial soil microorganisms and improves water infiltration and retention.

Managing pasture height and grazing pressure is essential for long-term pasture productivity. Horses should begin grazing when forage reaches six to eight inches and be removed when grasses are grazed down to approximately three to four inches. Rotational grazing, where horses are moved between paddocks, allows pastures time to recover and regrow. This practice reduces soil erosion, limits weed establishment, and can help reduce internal parasite pressure by interrupting parasite life cycles.

Spring is an important time for weed management. Early-season weeds compete with desirable forage for light, nutrients, and moisture. Mowing or spot-treating weeds before seed production helps reduce their spread. Overseeding thin or bare areas with recommended forage species improves pasture density and resilience. Legumes, such as clover, can contribute nitrogen to the soil and improve forage quality, but should be managed carefully to avoid excessive stands.

Horse owners should also be aware of the sugar content of spring forage. Cool-season grasses often contain elevated levels of nonstructural carbohydrates during rapid growth, which can increase the risk of laminitis in susceptible horses. Gradual turnout and limited grazing periods are recommended. Grazing during early morning hours, particularly following warm nights, when sugar levels tend to be lower, may help reduce risk. Providing hay prior to turnout, using grazing muzzles, or limiting access time are additional management options for horses with metabolic concerns.

Access to clean water and shade should be evaluated before the grazing season begins. Water troughs should be clean, functional, and located to encourage even pasture use. Shade from trees or constructed shelters helps reduce heat stress as temperatures rise and prevents horses from congregating in limited areas, which can lead to overgrazing and soil compaction.

Spring is also a good time to plan long-term pasture improvements. Address drainage concerns by correcting low areas or improving water flow to reduce standing water. Incorporating organic matter can improve soil structure and water-holding capacity. Evaluating fencing and paddock layout may improve grazing efficiency and support rotational grazing systems.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)

By: Jonas Asbill, Richard Goforth, Lauren Greene, Margaret Ross, Area Specialized Poultry Agents with N.C. Cooperative

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI or "bird flu") is a real threat to the poultry industry in North Carolina, the United States, and other poultry producing countries around the globe. It has been found in the NC poultry industry as recently as this year. You can read current press releases here: https://www.ncagr.gov/divisions/veterinary/AvianInfluenza This website also has information on the following topics: protecting your flock, food safety, wild birds: risk and reporting, commercial poultry, and detections in livestock.

Producers, both big and small, should continue to practice proper biosecurity protocols to keep commercial and domestic flocks away from areas frequented by migratory birds, all waterfowl, and other wild birds. If at all possible, they should not have unprotected access to the outdoors. HPAI could wipe out an entire flock when infected.

In addition to routine biosecurity protocols, other things to consider at this time include: relocating flocks away from all natural bodies of water, covering the top of any open or screened runs with metal and/or plastic to prevent wild bird droppings from falling into the bird area, and removing wild bird feeders or distancing them from backyard flocks as much as possible. Also, if your birds are more confined than usual, consider adding forms of enrichment to discourage birds from pecking one another such as tree branches, cabbage, melons, pecking blocks, hanging aluminum pie pans, etc. Also be sure to limit visitors to your farm. If you do have visitors to your farm, be sure they wear boot covers and disposable overalls. It's also important to have a dedicated set of clothing you wear when working with your own flock that you don't wear out to other farms or places other farmers visit too like local feed and seed stores. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) classifies warning signs of HPAI as reduced energy, decreased appetite, and/or decreased activity, lower egg production and/or soft-shelled or misshapen eggs, swelling of the head, eyelids, comb and wattles, purple discoloration of the wattles, comb and legs, difficulty breathing, runny nares (nose), and/or sneezing, twisting of the head and neck, stumbling, falling down, tremors and/or circling, and/or greenish diarrhea.

If your birds are sick or dying, report it right away to your local veterinarian, the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Veterinary Division at 919-707-3250, or the N.C. Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory System at 919-733-3986.
- NCDA&CS News Release January 26, 2023 -

Please take a look at our HPAI educational resource page at https://poultry.ces.ncsu.edu/2022/02/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-educational-resources/. Share this information with other poultry keepers that you know as well. We all need to know the facts and be extra cautious during this time to protect our flocks and our industry. If you have any questions or concerns not addressed in this article, please don't hesitate to reach out to your local area specialized poultry agent by contacting your local Cooperative Extension Office.