

Fodder Farming for Profit efficiency of dairy farmers in Kenya – Part 2

Weeds are a farmers' greatest enemy because they compete with the crop and if they take charge crops end up withering due to few nutrients.

Weeds are present on a fodder farm and if not differentiated with the fodder they end up infecting animals. Datura weed is a poisonous weed that kills animals when ingested. Desmodium is a climbing perennial legume with small leaves and deep roots. It's of high quality protein, rich forage and fixes nitrogen hence increasing yields. Desmodium has a protein of about 15-25 crude protein percentage and digestible fibre is between 56-76 % and it can survive for 8-10 seasons if managed well.

Best fertilizer

Desmodium can be fertilized with (NPK) Nitrogen Phosphorous and Potassium fertilizer. One can use 23-23 or 17-17-17 type of fertilizer but for desmodium, nitrogenous fertilizer is not needed since it converts nitrogen by itself. Dairy cow manure usage leads to phosphorous deficiency.

Desmodium is usually best for dairy goats, calves and newly calved high dairy cow producers because it helps cut the cost of dairy meal concentrates and is cheaper than concentrates.

Establishing fodder

It can be established in two ways; by using seed whereby the seed is buried at 2mm depth in the soil and this requires enough water for the seeds. The other way is by doing splits through using established plant then splitting where the roots

are and planted to attached themselves in the soil.

Spacing during planting is 1 foot by 1 foot and the split will colonize remaining parts. Desmodium with low nutrition has colour yellow to mean less phosphorous, protein and nitrogen.

Best Conditions

Desmodium needs moderate soils with average water retention. These are loam- sandy, loam- clay pure loam soils. Seeds usually take about 75- 90 days to mature but for the first cuttings it is delayed to roughly about 150 days so as to let it flower, develop seeds for next regrowth.

Most common varieties of desmodium are green leaf with reddish brown spot on upper surface, silver leaf which has stems and leaves covered in dense hairs which are sticky. When ready to be cut, 30% of desmodium will have flowered and cutting is done four inches above soil.