

Saturday, February 11, 2012

Another lightbulb comes on

When I look at the time ahead and the time behind me I realize that I have less in front than behind. Oh well.

I have so much to learn about farming in general. I don't know how farmers do it in one generation, especially if they are like the current generation and don't want to learn from their elders but I suppose we all muddle along as best we can.

One of the ways we can reduce our cost of production is to improve the quality of our crops especially our forages and pastures. We have effectively mined the land for the last 14 years by taking hay crop after hay crop. While putting some manure back on the fields I am not sure that we have returned as much as we have removed. It is time to get back to basics. It goes beyond being a grass farmer with a by-product of lamb. We are bacteria and fungi farmers with a by product of soil. The rest just is icing.

The industry standard with horses is to bed with shavings or sawdust. This stuff just does not break down. Why? It takes a carbon:nitrogen ratio of 25-35: 1 to begin composting manure and bedding. Fresh sawdust and shavings are 500:1; even rotted sawdust is 200:1. It will actually pull nitrogen out of your soil in order to break down. No wonder horse facilities have mountains of this stuff hanging around.

We stopped using shavings 6 years ago and now bed the horses in straw when they come inwhich is very seldom. We now put 1-2" of sawdust on the bottom to absorb urine and then bed the rest in straw. We do the same with the sheep, though with the hay waste, we seldom have to add more straw. Unlike with the horses, we let a pack build up for the sheep and clean it out in the spring.

This winter we have our chores down to a fine art form; whizz in and out. It leaves a lot more time to read up about soil care and feeding. Maybe I will learn enough by the time I join the complement of fertilizers.

TTFN,
Laurie