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Comparing the costs of organic forage

September 6, 2022



Lead author Jonathan Kubesch, then a graduate student at the University of Tennessee, measures tall fescue. Photo courtesy of Marcia Quinby.

Demand for organic food has been steadily increasing over the past years; however, most of the organic products on the market are fruits, vegetables, and grains. Meanwhile, there is a growing demand for organic animal-based products that producers can meet by transitioning from conventional forage to organic to feed these animals.

In an article in *Crop, Forage & Turfgrass Management*, researchers evaluated the economic viability of transitioning forage systems to organic production. They compared several forage species, including perennial and annual forages, as well as grasses and legume species. The team found that, during the three-year transition period, tall fescue mixed with alfalfa was the least expensive treatment. Bermudagrass proved more costly, based on the amount of forage produced. Fertilization costs were also higher when legumes were absent from the treatments, which greatly impacted total cost of production.

Further research should focus on the forage establishment stand failures that can occur during the transition since these will determine its success. More empirical data on these stand failures are also needed, especially during the development of the enterprise budgets.

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Kubesch, J.O.C., Nave, R.L.G., Griffith, A.P., Cui, S., & Bates, G.E. (2022). Economic outcomes for transitioning to organic forage production. *Crop, Forage & Turfgrass Management, 8*, e220178. **https://doi.org/10.1002/cft2.20178**

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