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**NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:**

***DENNIS SMITH  
COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT  
GREGG COUNTY***

**SUPPLEMENTAL FORAGE MANAGEMENT FOR EAST TEXAS  
WHITE-TAILED DEER**

The white-tailed deer is the most popular big game species in Texas. Our large deer population has generated a tremendous sport hunting demand, which has developed into more than a billion-dollar-a-year industry.

Landowners are becoming more interested in intensive deer management strategies in order to conserve deer populations in the face of decreasing deer habitat. Existing habitat is threatened by the growing human population in East Texas, as well as by land use changes, urbanization, highway and road construction, water development and certain cattle management, timber management and farming methods.

The establishment of supplemental food plots is an important deer management strategy which is becoming widely accepted throughout eastern Texas and much of the southeastern U.S. However, most plantings are not aimed at improving the nutrition of whitetails. This is critical since much of the southeastern deer range (including East Texas) provides substandard nutrition for desirable deer production. The use of supplemental food plots as an intensive management tool evolved from hunters' efforts to concentrate deer in one area for harvest. It is just as important to use plots to improve the nutrition of whitetails and add critical minerals (particularly calcium and phosphorus) to the diet of a deer herd.

Well planned food plots can increase forage availability and at least partially compensate for decreases in suitable deer habitat. However, maximum benefits can be obtained only if forages complement the diet

available from native vegetation and if forages are available when native vegetation is lacking or is low in nutritional value. In East Texas these stress periods occur in late summer and late winter.

In addition to timing the availability of supplemental forage properly, landowners also must plant appropriate species in the best available sites, use correct planting techniques and ensure soil fertility.

With either warm-or-cool-season supplemental forages, soil samples should be taken to determine lime and fertilizer requirements. Failure to properly amend the soil may result in drastically reduced yield or excessive weed competition.

In choosing a species or combination, keep in mind that the forage should:

1. increase the nutrition available to deer;
2. be readily accepted by deer;
3. be available at times when native forage is lacking in quality and quantity; and
4. be adapted to both the region and the site.

In other words, if a forage species does not improve nutrition, if a deer won't eat it, if it's not available during periods of stress or if it won't yield sufficient quantities to justify establishment, DON'T PLANT IT! Furthermore, since most plant species are commercially available in several varieties, care should be taken to plant a variety adapted to a particular area.

Supplemental forages are not cure-alls for poor deer management practices. Without proper habitat management and population control, food plot establishment is a waste of time and money for the hunter, landowner and deer manager. However, food plots can be an important part of the overall management of deer in East Texas. Properly established food plots can increase the production capacity of deer habitat by enhancing the nutritional level of whitetails throughout the year.

For additional information please go to the Gregg County Website at [gregg-tx.tamu.edu](http://gregg-tx.tamu.edu).

*Dennis Smith can be contacted at the Gregg County Extension Office by e-mail at [dg-smith@tamu.edu](mailto:dg-smith@tamu.edu) or telephone at: 903-236-8429.*

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