

## Warm season grass touted as new crop

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The Virginia Cooperative Extension is offering an opportunity for farmers and rural landowners to turn old pastures into a new cash crop for Central Virginia.

Warm season grasses, or grass that grows best during the summer months, have recently emerged on the farming scene as another option for producers and cattlemen to use to offset the economic downturn, said Michael LaChance of the Nelson County Cooperative Extension office.

“There’s always a need to address changing economies,” LaChance said. “There’s really a great potential here.”

LaChance said the grass could be used to feed cattle in the summertime when cool season grasses have been depleted and could also be grown and sold as hay or as a possible biofuel.

“It makes sense for the cattlemen, it also would make sense for somebody who is looking at getting into doing something to produce biofuel as well,” he said.

The cost of the crop is an incentive for producers, LaChance said, since it does not require lime or fertilizer.

“Given the high cost of fertilizers, the idea of having a grass crop that supplies a partial supply of the nutrition during the summertime and doesn’t require lime or fertilizers is very attractive,” he said.

These grasses have previously been problematic and are regarded as being hard to establish.

An Ohio company, FDC Enterprises, has developed a treatment for the crops seeds that make it easier to establish and offers its guaranteed services to local growers for \$300 per acre.

LaChance said farmers could qualify for some cost-sharing monies to help with the establishment price of the crop.

The Virginia Cooperative Extension office, along with Virginia Public Policy, recently hosted a dinner lecture, at which more than two dozen local farmers attended to hear about the potential new crop. From that meeting, two local growers have already signed up and dedicated 30 acres of land to warm season grasses, LaChance said.

“There is already interest there.”

For more information, call Michael LaChance at (434) 263-4035.

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