UK to host Novel Tall Fescue Renovation Workshop, March 19

Tall fescue is a double-edged sword for many livestock producers. University of Kentucky forage extension specialists are teaming up with the Alliance for Grassland Renewal to host a workshop to teach producers how to renovate their tall fescue pastures with a novel endophyte variety.

The Novel Tall Fescue Renovation Workshop will take place March 19 at UK’s Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory located at 1408 Bull Lea Road in Lexington. The daylong event begins at 8:15 a.m. EDT.

Producers have widely used tall fescue in pastures for decades, because it survives well under many conditions including drought, cold, overgrazing, insects and diseases. However, the most common variety, KY-31, also contains toxins that can severely affect cattle and horse performance. By replacing it with a novel endophyte variety, producers can keep the beneficial aspects of the grass while reducing the negative impacts. “There are a growing number of novel or friendly endophyte tall fescue varieties on the market, including UK’s own variety Lacefield MaxQ II,” said Ray Smith, forage extension specialist in the UK College of Agriculture, Food and Environment. “This workshop will help producers learn how they can begin to incorporate these new varieties into their operation. The workshop will also show producers how they can better manage existing KY-31 stands so they are safer for their animals.”

During the workshop, participants will hear from Kentucky producers, UK specialists and speakers from across the country. They will discuss fescue toxicosis and the economics, testing, establishment, management, products and incentives for renovating pastures with a novel variety.

Visit http://www.TallFescueKY2020.eventbrite.com to register. Registration is $65 per person before March 11 and $80 after that date. Individuals can also mail registration forms to Krista Lea, University of Kentucky, N -222C Ag. Science Center North, Lexington, KY, 40546. For more information, visit the UK Forage Extension website at http://forages.ca.uky.edu. ~ Katie Pratt

Visit www.grasslandrenewal.org for more info on other workshops.

Winter Damage Mitigation

Last year’s winter brought on a lot of winterkill and decimated the potential for forage production. Spring and summer did not provide many opportunities to establish new forage production fields. As a result, forage inventories are low and many forage fields are in poor shape, expected to yield well below their potential. What can be done? The fastest remedy is to improve what you have. While starting over will set you back until early summer at best, improving an existing field with a short term grass species provides more and earlier forage and is cheaper to accomplish. There are quite a few options for spring planting, each with their own “specialty”:

- Frost seeding is a cheap and efficient way to overseed existing forage fields, but the window for frost seeding is closing fast. Seed is applied with minimal damage to the field, ready to germinate as soon as the conditions are suitable. Seed can be applied with a fertilizer spreader, but depending on equipment it may be challenging to get the seed evenly spread, as grass seed is very light. Make narrow passes when broadcasting in

Forage Timely Tips: March

- Continue pasture renovation by no-tilling seeding legumes.
- Place small seed at 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep and check depth several times during planting; slow down for more precise seeding.
- Continue feeding hay until adequate forage exists in the pasture for grazing.
- Spring seeding of grasses should be done in early to mid-March (but fall is preferred)
- Begin smoothing and re-seeding hay feeding and heavy traffic areas.
- Graze pastures seeded with clover to reduce competition from existing grasses. <Pull off before grazing new clover plants.>
- Provide free choice high-magnesium mineral to prevent grass tetany on lush spring growth.
- Apply 30-40 lbs N/acre (65-90 lbs urea/acre) for quicker spring greenup
this manner. Using a drill to get the seed in the ground, will improve the establishment rate of non-coated seed. It offers an even seed placement and better seed-soil contact. ~ excerpt from DLF Pickseed Spring 2020 Forage newsletter.

Virginia Tech Testing Bee-Friendly Forage Material
Named for its predominant grass, the “fescue belt” stretches for 1,000 miles across the southeastern U.S., from Virginia and the Carolinas in the east, to Kansas and Oklahoma in the west. Tall fescue feeds cattle on thousands of farms and ranches in this stretch, according but cattle and wildlife can suffer from tall fescue toxicity.

A new study conducted at Virginia Tech aims to address problems associated with the predominance of toxic tall fescue on many southeastern farms. Led by Dr. Megan O’Rourke, the research team will plant native prairie grasses and wildflowers at research stations in Virginia and Tennessee and at six on-farm sites in Northern Virginia.

“We’re trying to transform the landscape to support both cattle and pollinators by planting more native wildflowers on farmland,” according to O’Rourke.

The $1.8 million project is funded half by a federal grant and half by contributions of time, land, cattle and money by Virginia Tech, the University of Tennessee, farmers working with the researchers, and a nonprofit called Virginia Working Landscapes. The team will test 20 different wildflowers native to Virginia and Tennessee and will measure which ones attract the most bees and, when planted alongside native grasses, produce the healthiest cattle.

Another faculty member working on the study is Dr. Ben Tracy, a Virginia Tech professor of grassland ecology who has been studying native prairie grasses and the effects of tall fescue on cattle for the past 15 years or so, the release says.

“The main health problem that fescue causes for cattle, fescue toxicity, is not fatal, but it costs the cattle industry millions of dollars a year,” Tracy says. Affected cattle have trouble regulating their body temperatures in hot weather and they don’t eat as much and gain as much weight as healthy cattle. “Hopefully, adding native grasses and wildflowers to pastures will reduce fescue toxicosis.”

If this study succeeds, adding native wildflowers to pastures in the fescue belt will become a new conservation practice that USDA’s National Resource Conservation Service will cost share. ~ Katie James, Bovine Vet Online

Quote of the Month: “Organic Matter is Almost Magical”
The value and benefits of soil organic matter in agricultural production deserve regular mention. Organic matter contains nutrients essential to plant growth, many of which are released slowly and benefit crops throughout the growing season. It increases moisture holding ability and cation exchange capacity (nutrient holding ability) of soil, and favors desirable soil microbial activity. When good levels of organic matter are present, soil cover is more easily established and maintained, reducing likelihood of erosion. In the majority of pastures and hay fields, almost anything that increases organic matter is almost certain to be beneficial to future production. This includes application of plant residues or animal waste, use of cover crops and good grazing management. Order your copy of Forage-Livestock Quote and Concepts, vol. 2, today at https://forages.ca.uky.edu/content/forage-books

Which Side of the Fence are You On?

To maximize spring regrowth, follow these simple steps.
1) Leave 3-4 inches of stubble in the fall
2) Soil test and apply lime, P and K.
3) Maintain >30% clover or apply N.
4) Control weeds if necessary.
5) Apply 30-40 lbs nitrogen per acre for quicker greenup.

Go to the UK Forage website under the grazing tab to see the complete time lapse video showing spring regrowth between a rested pastures and a heavily grazed pasture. Photos are available on page 4. ~ Dr. Ray Smith and Gabriel Roberts

Featured Forage Publication: Alfalfa Disease Calendar (PPA-44)
This calendar was created to assist producers and agricultural professionals improve alfalfa production. Knowing when to expect certain diseases can help with timely management. While infectious diseases do not follow a calendar per se, and it is not possible to make foolproof predictions, this publication does provide useful month-to-month guidelines for the likely timetable of various alfalfa diseases. Access this publication at the UK Plant Pathology Extension Publications webpage or google UKY Alfalfa Disease Calendar.

Upcoming Events
(see website for details and online registration)
MAR 18 - Novel Tall Fescue Workshop, Spring Hill, TN
MAR 19 - Novel Tall Fescue Workshop. Lexington, KY
APR 14 - Fencing School, Glasgow, KY
APR 16 - Fencing School, Grand Rivers, KY
APR 21-22 - KY Grazing School, Princeton, KY
APR 28-30 - So. Pasture Forage Crop Imp. Conf., Montgomery, AL
MAY 19 - Small Ruminant Fencing School, Frankfort, KY
MAY 21 - Fencing School, Campton, KY

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Bonus content on pages 3 and 4!
Getting a Jump on Stubborn Winter Pasture Weeds

All but the thickest of grass pastures and hayfields are being invaded. Invaded by winter annual or biennial weeds like buttercup, chickweed, henbit (and its cousin deadnettle), musk or nodding thistle and poison hemlock. All are winter annuals except for musk thistle, which is a biennial – meaning it takes two years to complete its lifecycle. These plants can be very competitive with our perennial cool season grasses, especially in new seedings. Mowing these weeds is generally ineffective, but they can easily be controlled with common broadleaf herbicides in the coming weeks if we get temperatures approaching 60°F. These weeds can be recognized pretty easily (with a little coaching, which is just about to happen, so read on).

Every year, I personally struggle with identifying these weeds, especially early enough to have a meaningful chance at control. I am especially motivated this year as I am helping a producer nurse a few hundred acres of newly seeded orchardgrass and bluegrass through to spring.

This article will focus on five very common winter weeds of pasture: buttercup, common chickweed, henbit, purple deadnettle and poison hemlock. To determine the appropriate herbicides to use, see “Broadleaf Weeds of Kentucky Pastures (AGR-207)” by UK’s Dr. J.D. Green and Dr. Bill Witt on the UK Weed Science page (https://weedscience.ca.uky.edu). ~ Jimmy Henning, Farmers Pride

Buttercup should be vegetative to get good herbicidal control. Leaves are shiny and about the size of a fingertip.

Common chickweed. Leaves are shiny and small, about a quarter inch across or less. This weed often grows in dense mats at the soil surface.

Vegetative henbit is easily confused with purple deadnettle which is a closely related species. Leaves are 1/2 to 3/4 inch across but are more 'lobed' than deadnettle. In the vegetative stage, leaves are at the end of a petiole, or stem. When flowering, leaves are directly attached to the elongating stem.

Vegetative purple deadnettle (above, right). Leaves are about ½ to ¾ inch across and are more heart shaped and less 'lobed' than henbit. Control for both is similar.

Poison hemlock grows in patches in fields and has a fern-like appearance with triangular, dark green leaves at a vegetative stage. At later stages, stems have a characteristic purple mottling.
This pasture was rested all winter long.

This pasture was grazed all winter long.

Time Lapse Photos Showing Spring Regrowth