Forage News

Keeping Forage- Livestock Producers in Kentucky Informed
Dr. Ray Smith and Echo Gotsick, MS editors
April 2025

UK Spring Fencing Schools April 22 and 24

Robert Frost said "fences make good neighbors." Considering that good fences mark clear boundaries, keep livestock contained and look nice, he was probably right. Farmers who know how to build and maintain a good fence add value to their farms and protect their assets. The University of Kentucky is hosting two spring fencing schools to give farmers the most up-to-date information on fencing techniques and construction. "This year, we will focus on how to construct both fixed knot woven wire and smooth electrified high tensile fencing," said Dr. Chris Teutsch, forage extension specialist with the University of KY. "We plan to emphasize properly constructing H-braces, which are key components of all fencing systems. Our goal is to help farmers learn the basics of building a strong, durable fence that will last a couple of decades or more. If they choose to hire someone else to build fences, we want them to know what a well-constructed fence looks like." The 2025 spring schools will occur April 22 in Owensboro and April 24 in Tompkinsville. The schools will run from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. local time. Each school is limited to 30 participants so register soon. The cost is $35 per person. This cost covers lunch, a fencing notebook and safety gear. Participants should bring leather gloves for the hands-on portion of the school. Go to the Forage Website under Events for more information and to register or go to the direct links. For the Owensboro school at https://2025FencingDaviess.eventbrite.com , and the Tompkinsville school at https://2025FencingMonroe.eventbrite.com

2025 Kentucky Beginning Grazing School April 29-30

The 2025 Kentucky Beginning Grazing School is designed to help livestock producers improve profitability with hands-on and classroom learning. The school is April 29-30 at the Logan County Extension office in Russellville and features an updated curriculum. "While this school targets beginning graziers, the topics and discussion will benefit producers along all segments of their grazing journey" says Chris Teutsch, UK Forage Specialist and grazing school organizer. This year's school has been updated to put greater emphasis on soils which are the foundation upon which sustainable grazing systems are built. Topics on April 29 include an introduction to soils, rotational grazing, meeting nutritional needs on pasture, grazing math concepts, travel to a local grazing operation, portable/seasonal water systems, methods to access pasture production and determine stocking rate, and hands-on small paddock set-up demonstrations. After lunch at the farm, more topics include electric fencing to control grazing, offsets, soil and hay sampling, forage plant growth and grazing management, and choosing forage species for a comprehensive grazing system.

Topics for April 30 include fence types and costs, electric fencing for serious graziers, a grazing system design case study and exercise, and a discussion on how to reinvigorate a rundown farm. A local producer will discuss how they make grazing work on their farm. Students will also have the opportunity to calibrate a grain drill and try a GPS unit designed for frost-seeding pastures.

The school will begin at 7:30 a.m. CDT each day and will adjourn at 4:30 p.m. CDT. Lunch will be provided and the course will include both field and classroom work, so be sure to dress appropriately. To register and for more information, go to the UK Forage Website under events or the direct link https://Spring2025GrazingSchool.eventbrite.com . Registration is limited and is $60 per participant and ends April 15. To register by mail, send a check made out to KFGC to Caroline Roper, UK Research and Education Center, PO Box 469, Princeton, KY 42445.

Forage Timely Tips: April

- ✓ Sign up for an April KY Grazing or Fencing School.
- ✓ Graze winter annuals that were seeded last fall.
- ✓ Graze cover crops using temporary fencing.
- ✓ As pasture growth begins, rotate through pastures quickly to keep up with the fast growth of spring.
- ✓ Creep-graze calves and lambs, allowing them access to highest quality pasture.
- ✓ Finish re-seeding winter feeding sites where soil disturbance and sod damage occurred.
- ✓ As pasture growth exceeds the needs of the livestock, remove some fields from the rotation and allow growth to accumulate for hay or haylage
- ✓ Determine need for supplemental warm season forages such as pearl millet or sudangrass. Wait till May to plant though.
- ✓ Flash graze pastures newly seeded with clovers to manage competition.

Pub of the Month: Fescue Toxicosis in Cattle-ID221

UK's "Fescue Toxicosis in Cattle" publication was recently updated by lead authors Megan Romano (UK toxicologist) and Michelle Arnold (UK ruminant extension veterinarian). We are highlighting this pub in April because fescue toxicosis can become apparent on cattle farms in KY a few weeks after fescue starts active spring growth (typically mid to late April). It contains a detailed description of the endophyte in tall fescue and the alkaloids it produces (primarily ergovaline). This pub provides details about the classic signs and symptoms of fescue toxicosis in cattle including decreased reproductive performance, decreased milk production, and heat stress. It describes the effects of heat stress on average daily gain. This comprehensive article also describes the severe effects sometimes evidenced in cattle including fescue foot and fat necrosis. Finally, ID-221 details some of the reasons for lower reproductive performance such as lower conception rates from lower progesterone, poor embryo quality, and decreased sperm motility.
The authors outline how KY cattlemen can collect and submit fescue samples for testing including endophyte percentage in a pasture and ergovaline analysis in order to assess risk. The remainder of the publication describes prevention and control of fescue toxicosis from simple procedures such as a good mineral program to improving the overall diet. It outlines other management practices that involve more detailed planning like avoiding fescue at certain times of the year when ergovaline is highest, removing seedheads (which are high in ergovaline), and using intensive rotational grazing. Lastly, it describes the complete cure for fescue toxicosis, that is, completely replacing the stand with novel endophyte tall fescue varieties. The effort and expense of this may not be needed by many KY producers, but when fescue toxicosis is causing major reproductive or animal gain losses, this practice may make sense. To download this pub go to the UK Forage Website under Animal Disorders or use the following link: https://publications.ca.uky.edu/id-221

Fescue Article from The Horse

Another useful publication/article recently appeared in the periodical The Horse. It is entitled "The Pros and Cons of Tall Fescue" and describes this plant as the most resilient grass we have for KY horse pastures, but also as a nemesis for late-term pregnant broodmares. Fortunately, KY-31 tall fescue is a very useful pasture for the typical pleasure horse farm, but broodmare farms are increasingly favoring stand replacement with novel endophyte varieties.

The following is the Take-Home Message of this publication. Because tall fescue is a popular and well-established grass across pastures in the U.S., eliminating the risk of toxicosis in broodmares is nearly impossible. The only way to avoid fescue toxicosis is to understand the nature of the plants in your pasture. Know when ergovaline levels will be high, and choose the most beneficial management options to reduce the risk to broodmares. Download or view this pub at https://thehorse.com/1125530/the-pros-and-cons-of-tall-fescue/

Alfalfa Weevil Wake-up Call

We had an unseasonably cold winter in Kentucky this year, or at least colder than in recent years. Does this mean that insect pests like alfalfa weevil were killed? See below an explanation from University of Minnesota Extension Specialist, Dr. Anthony Hanson. The long and short of the article is that if alfalfa weevils were not necessarily killed in MN this winter, they probably were not killed in Kentucky either.
Hanson explains that cold weather can prevent overwintering insects like alfalfa weevil from living to see the next growing season. Alfalfa weevils overwinter as adults in leaf litter and alfalfa stubble. It takes soil surface temperatures of about 13ºF or lower to kill 20% to 30% of an alfalfa weevil population; however, a small subset of pests are expected to survive soil surface temperatures as low as 1ºF. Dr. Hanson explains that, as cold-blooded animals, insects match their body temperatures to their surroundings. "Even so, many insects can survive temperatures well below freezing due to antifreeze compounds like glycerol that lower the freezing point of water in their bodies, similar to antifreeze in a car," he states.

Dr. Hanson states that it can be difficult to estimate soil surface temperatures considering variations in plant cover and residue on the ground surface. Therefore, Hanson uses 2-inch soil temperature data as a conservative estimate to create annual pest population predictions, which he bases on the coldest night of the year. The coldest night in Minnesota this winter was recorded on January 21 when air temperatures fell below -25ºF and 2-inch soil temperatures were about 5ºF. Therefore, even in MN the soil temperature may not have been cold enough to kill alfalfa weevils. Part of this was the insulating effect of snow. But just as there was snow on the ground in MN, there was snow on the ground in KY for most of our coldest nights in much of the state. So maybe some alfalfa weevils were injured this winter in KY, but likely if you needed to spray last year, there's a pretty good chance you'll need to spray this year. Remember to rotate your insecticides when spraying alfalfa weevil or any other insect pest. In recent years, we have had reports of alfalfa weevil resistance on fields with repeated applications of Warrior year after year. **~Excerpt of an article in Hay and Forage Grower Mar. 18 by Amber Friedrichsen**. View the entire article by going to www.HayandForage.com or the direct link: https://hayandforage.com/article-5268-An-alfalfa-weevil-wake-up-call.html

UK Alfalfa Weevil Monitoring

For most of KY, it's time or past time to begin monitoring for alfalfa weevil. The link below will take you to the UK site "Calculating Insect Degree Days for Kentucky Counties." Make sure you put Alfalfa Weevils under the insect column if it's not already there. Also, make sure you select your county under the county listing. Adair County is the default since

it's the first county in Kentucky alphabetically. When degree days reach 188 it's time to start monitoring and although we are behind last year most counties in KY have now reached 188 weevil degree days. https://weather.uky.edu/cgi-bin/kyc_dd_insect.pl
Another publication outlines how to monitor for alfalfa weevil: INSECTICIDE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALFALFA, CLOVER AND PASTURES, ENT-17. Here is the direct link to this pub. https://www.uky.edu/Ag/PAT/recs/crop/pdf/Entfact-17.pdf . Although this is an older publication, it still gives the correct monitoring techniques and most of the commonly used insecticides.

'Good fences make good neighbors': Kentucky Spring Fencing Schools perfect for agriculturalists, homeowners
By Jennifer Elwell and Caroline Roper

The University of Kentucky Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment Master Grazer program, in conjunction with the Kentucky Forage and Grassland Council and Kentucky Beef Network, will offer its Spring Fencing Schools in two locations this year.
Agriculturalists, producers, homeowners and interested community members can attend on April 22 at St. Columbia Church in Lewisport, Ky. or on April 24 at the Monroe County Extension Office in Tompkinsville, Ky.

"Fencing is vitally important on the farm," said Chris Teutsch, associate professor for the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, stationed at the UK Research and Education Center in Princeton. "Good fences keep our livestock safe and animals from getting out. Understanding the ins and outs of proper fencing is important for anyone installing fencing on their property, including residential homeowners."
Beginning at 7:30 a.m. (CST), the morning session will address fencing types and costs, construction basics, electric fencing, innovations in technologies and an overview of Kentucky fence laws.
Participants will put their knowledge to work in a hands-on fence-building session at a local farm in the afternoon. The demonstration includes:

- Safety, layout and a post-driving demonstration
- H-brace construction
- Knot tying, splices and insulator installation
- Installing Stay-Tuff fixed-knot fencing
- Installing high-electrified tensile fencing

On April 22, participants will visit Wes and Jennifer Poole of Poole Farms in Lewisport, Ky. This first-generation operation raises commercial turkeys, 1,500 acres of row crops and beef cattle.
"We participated in the University of Kentucky's Fencing School in 2023 and learned numerous skills to bring back to our operation," Jennifer Poole said. "We are looking forward to hosting this event for Daviess County and surrounding areas because 'good fences make good neighbors,' and we hope our fellow ranchers can learn some new skills too."
On April 24, participants will visit Thompson Farms in Tompkinsville, a 400-head cow-calf operation. Jason Thompson, who farms with his father, placed first in the American Grassland and Forage Council's Forage Spokesperson Contest this year.
"I am looking forward to hosting the team on the farm and the opportunity to learn more about properly fencing my pastures," Thompson said. "It's our responsibility to build strong fences and keep our animals in."

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Forage News

Upcoming Events (see Forage website for details and to register, click on EVENTS)

Apr. 22– KY Fencing School, Owensboro, KY
Apr. 24 – KY Fencing School, Tompkinsville, KY
Apr. 29-30 – Beginning Grazing School, Russellville, KY
Apr. 21-23 – Southern Pasture Conf., Corpus Cristi, TX
May. 9 - Fleming Co. Hay Field Day, Flemingsburg, KY
Sept. 24-25– Intermediate Grazing School, Versailles, KY
Oct. 28 – KY Grazing Conf. East, Winchester, KY
Oct. 29– KY Grazing Conf. West, Leitchfield, KY
Jan. 11-13, 2026 – AFGC Annual Conf, Asheville, NC

Martin-Gatton
College of Agriculture, Food and Environment
University of Kentucky