



# Forage News

## Keeping Forage-Livestock Producers in Kentucky Informed

Dr. Ray Smith and Echo Gotsick, MS—editors

May 2025

### Quality Hay Production Field Day—May 9

We are starting to see fescue and orchardgrass seedheads in many hay production fields across the state. The highest quality grass and mixed hay is harvested at the boot or early seedhead stage. For more information on harvesting and marketing high-quality hay come to the Quality Hay Production Field Day in Fleming County on May 9 from 9:00 to 2:00. View equipment when you arrive. Educational talks start at 10:00 and hay harvesting demos at 12:30. Hosted by cooperative extension in Fleming, Mason, Bracken, Lewis, and Robertson counties. Location: 1965 Martha Mills Rd, Flemingsburg, KY. Rain location: Fleming County Extension Office.

Sign up here: [https://uky.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_eONlkXSLdHPkOrQ](https://uky.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eONlkXSLdHPkOrQ)

### Pub of the Month: Warm Season Annual Grasses in Kentucky AGR-229

In Kentucky, cool-season grasses produce ample forage in the spring and fall, but high temperatures and short-term drought stress often limits growth during the summer months. Warm-season annual grasses can fill this gap with relatively high-quality forage when properly managed. The purpose of this publication is to provide an overview of the various summer annuals for Kentucky. Advantages of summer-annual grasses include fast germination and emergence, rapid growth, high productivity, and flexibility of utilization. Disadvantages include the cost of annual establishment and the increased risk of stand failure due to variable rainfall in late spring and early summer. Summer annual grasses are best used in a rotation with small grains or annual ryegrass to optimize productivity per unit of land area. They also have great utility as transition crops before the establishment of improved perennial forage species. Go to the full publication for more details under the forage website under Forage Species. The direct link is hyperlinked below:

[AGR229](#)

Additional, we have excellent publications for each of the main warm season annual grasses.

[AGR-234 Sudangrass and Sorghum-sudangrass Hybrids](#)

[AGR-230 \(Forage Sorghum\)](#)

[AGR-233 \(Foxtail Millet\)](#)

[AGR-231 \(Pearl Millet\)](#)

[AGR-232 \(Crabgrass\)](#)

### Forage Timely Tips: May

- ✓ Start hay harvests for quality forage. Consider making baleage to facilitate timely cutting.
- ✓ Seed warm season grasses for supplemental summer forage once soil temperature is at 60 F
- ✓ Clip, graze, or make hay to prevent seedhead formation.
- ✓ Consider temporary electric fencing to subdivide larger pastures and exclude areas for mechanical harvesting.
- ✓ Scout pastures for summer annual weeds and control when small.
- ✓ Rotate pastures as based in height rather than time. Start grazing tall fescue at 8-10" and stop grazing at 3-4". Stop grazing orchardgrass dominant pastures at 4-5" for quicker regrowth. results to select seed for spring renovation

### Jim Gerrish Receives the 2025 Plant and Soil Science Distinguished Alumni Award

Jim Gerrish received the 2025 Plant and Soil Sciences distinguished Alumnus award on April 4 and presented a seminar that day too. Jim earned a master's in Crop Ecology from UK in 1980. As an independent grazing lands educator and consultant, he serves farmers and ranchers across the US and internationally through American GrazingLands Services LLC. Residing in central Idaho, Jim works with various ranchers and has over 22 years of experience in beef-forage systems research at the University of Missouri, where he led the MU-Forage Systems Research Center to national prominence.

Jim has written a monthly column for The Stockman Grass-Farmer for over 20 years and authored three books on grazing management. He co-founded popular grazing management workshops at MU-FSRC, attended by over 3,000 producers and educators. Since moving to Idaho in 2004, he has managed a ranch with irrigated pastures and rangeland. He has been involved in sustainability efforts through the Green Hills Farm Project and has received numerous awards for his research and outreach contributions.

Jim's seminar will be uploaded to the UK Forage YouTube channel in the next couple of weeks. Also, Jim

led a forum for leaders in the forage industry in KY on the morning of April 4. The June issue of Forage News will include key highlights of this forum.



Photo shows Jim with his award and includes (left to right) Jimmy Henning, Jim Gerrish, Chuck Dougherty (Jim's master's advisor), Chris Teutsch and Ray Smith.

### Horse Owners and Hay Wants

The article "What Horse Owners Want from Haymakers" by *Mike Rankin* explores the complex relationship between hay producers and the horse market, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities within this niche. "We sometimes consider horse people as a bit of an enigma as to what they consider to be important when buying hay," said Bob Coleman at the Kentucky Alfalfa and Stored Forage Conference in Lexington last month.

Dr. Coleman shared insights from a national survey of horse owners that revealed key buying preferences. Horse owners often rely entirely on purchased hay due to limited land and resources, and most prefer manageable 40- to 60-pound bales. Price per bale topped the list of decision-making factors, but Coleman pointed out that many buyers overlook cost-per-pound, leading to economically inefficient purchases. Hay sellers can differentiate themselves by providing consistent quality, maintaining a solid reputation, and offering transparency about their product.

Coleman emphasized that while "horse quality" hay is frequently advertised, the term lacks a clear standard. Truly suitable horse hay must be free from mold, dust, and weeds, and have a moisture content below 16.5% to prevent respiratory and health issues. Nutritional quality, while ranked lower in buyer priority, remains critical—especially for horses with specific health needs. Coleman advocates for forage testing to assess crude protein and nonstructural carbohydrate (NSC) levels, particularly for horses with metabolic concerns. Ultimately, Coleman urged haymakers to approach their work with empathy and communication, understanding that serving the horse market is as much about meeting expectations as it is about producing quality forage.

Please visit the link below for the full article: <https://hayandforage.com/article-5275-What-horse-owners-want-from-haymakers.html>

### Myths About Tall Fescue Explored

Tall Fescue has become entrenched across the middle part of the eastern USA, creating a region called the Tall Fescue Belt. Many farms were planted to tall fescue in the 1960s, and many of those original stands are still productive today. Unfortunately, the variety planted, Kentucky -31, is known to host a fungus called an "endophyte", which produces toxins.

The incredible agronomic characteristics of Tall Fescue are what makes it a wicked problem. Essentially, the toxins that are good for the plant are very detrimental to livestock. There are many things you can do to help, including diluting pastures with other forage species, reducing fertilizer application and clipping seed heads. The ultimate solution is to replace the toxic tall fescue with the non-toxic "Novel Endophyte Tall Fescue", or some other species of forage.

Your context will determine if you really have a problem with fescue or not. If you have high performance cattle, fescue toxicosis will keep them from realizing their potential. If you are finishing animals for local meat, fescue toxicosis will increase your days to harvest and reduce meat quality. If you have great stands of tall fescue and few symptoms, then you might not have a problem. I watched a video this week that promoted some truths and some myths about tall fescue that I thought I would address here:

Tall Fescue is a GREAT grass! This one I think is both a Myth and a Truth. In the tall fescue belt there is no other species that can give all the benefits of tall fescue. When Kentucky 31 was released, it quickly became the conservation plant of choice. It established quickly and stubbornly persisted year after year on marginal land. It was promoted as the "first permanent pasture grass" for the south, and it lived up to that name.

Novel Endophyte Tall Fescue is too expensive to plant. This one is another myth. A farmer with excellent stands of KY31 tall fescue should carefully evaluate their situation before any conversion to novel is considered. If a pasture needs to be renovated, one thing I can clearly recommend to livestock producers is "don't plant KY31".

It is true that KY31 will be the least expensive seed you will buy. Today you can purchase KY31 for about \$1.50 per lb, while typical Novel Endophyte Tall Fescue seed will cost about \$4.00 per lb. Assuming a planting rate of 15 lbs per acre, that is a difference of \$37.50 per acre. If you run a budget and calculate the total cost of pasture renovation it will come to at least \$150 in costs other than seed.

So, the truth is that renovation is expensive no matter what you plant. My economic calculations show that if you plant Novel Endophyte Tall Fescue it will pay you back in about 4 years. If you plant KY31 in the same situation it will take 8 years to payback. So the real statement should be "pasture renovation is so expensive you can't afford to plant an inferior product like KY31".

In the end, each farmer in the tall fescue belt has to make a decision on how to manage

see blue.

the problem. Some with relatively tolerant animals, with cooler conditions, or who simply lack the farming skills needed to renovate pastures will stick with what they know. Other farmers will evaluate pastures and strategically renovate to provide better nutrition for high requirement animals. Renovation is costly, so it should be used to upgrade the forage system. Plant something like native warm season grasses or novel endophyte tall fescue that will compliment a base of toxic tall fescue.

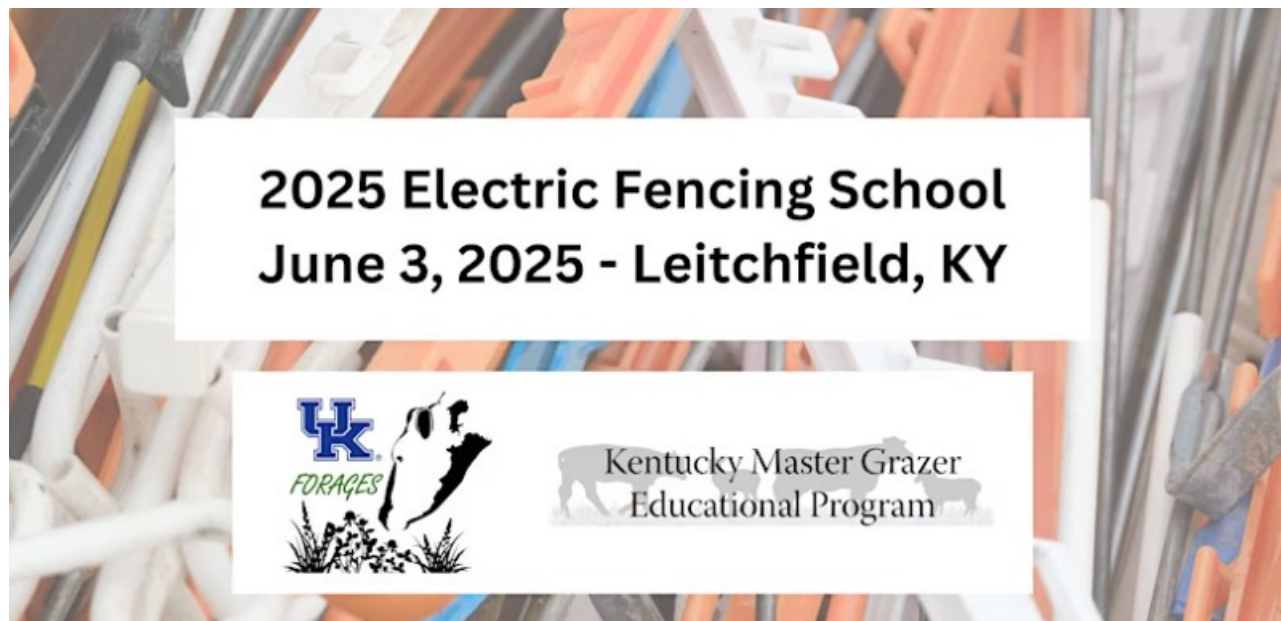
To learn more about Tall Fescue read the book "The Wonder Grass: The Story of Tall Fescue in the United States", which is available for free download. Also, visit [www.grasslandrenewal.org](http://www.grasslandrenewal.org) to learn more about Novel Endophyte Tall Fescue technology and upcoming educational opportunities. ~*excerpt of article by Dr. Matt Poore of NC State in Novel Notes*

See full link to article here: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/comparison-of-commercially-available-novel-endophyte-tall-fescue-forage-varieties>

### **Electric Fencing for Serious Graziers: Installation and Troubleshooting Event—June 3rd**

Please join us for the 2025 June Electric Fencing school! This event will take place at the Butler County Extension Office on June 3rd, 2025 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Please use this link to sign up: <https://ElectricFencing2025.eventbrite.com>





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# Forage News



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

**May 9** - Fleming Co. Hay Field Day,  
Flemingsburg, KY

**June 3** - Electric Fencing for Serious  
Graziers: Installation and  
Troubleshooting, Leitchfield, KY

**Sept. 24-25** - Intermediate Grazing School,  
Versailles, KY

**Oct. 28** — KY Grazing Conference,  
Winchester, KY

**Oct. 29** - KY Grazing Conference West,  
Leitchfield, KY

**Jan. 11-13, 2026** - AFGC Annual  
Conference, Asheville, NC

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[www.forages.ca.uky.edu](http://www.forages.ca.uky.edu).