

New Fescues Are Worth Considering

Tall fescue is a pasture grass we often have resisted using because it can contain some compounds that can harm livestock. That is changing!

Tall fescue is a high yielding and persistent cool-season grass. Compared to other grasses, fescue grows especially well in the fall so it often is used for winter grazing. Old fescue varieties often had an internal fungus, or endophyte, that produces chemicals that help the plant resist insects and diseases, which is good. But some of the chemicals also affect body temperature regulation, blood flow, and feed intake in livestock.

Horses can be very sensitive. Mares can abort or have stillborn foals, or they may fail to produce milk. In cattle we often see rough hair coats and more time spent standing in water or shade during summer. Cows produce less milk and often have difficulty conceiving. Intake can be especially low during summer so weight gains also are low. In winter, a condition called "fescue foot" can cause animals to lose hooves, ears, or tail switches during cold weather.

Many new fescue varieties, though, have been developed to be either "endophyte free", or they contain a novel, safe endophyte. These fescues are very safe to graze. Research here in Nebraska under both dryland and irrigated conditions has shown that many of these varieties are highly productive and have good survival in our area. Many producers are beginning to use them very successfully in their grazing programs. I think they are especially well suited for cow-calf operations and have a few acres on my own farm.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

