

Abundant Fescue Means Opportunity For Farmers

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

Missouri farmers have had an abundance of fescue growth in pastures this fall according to Tim Schnakenberg, agronomy specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

That extra fall growth will benefit cattle and horse grazing because it presents a great opportunity to use fescue for feed into the winter.

"One of the easiest ways to reduce the outflow of cash on a farm is to save money on feed costs and use the fescue growth that is available," said Schnakenberg.

Fescue has been around for at least 50 years. Farmers have come to depend on it as a feed source because it is in most pastures, it can tolerate tough conditions and it has excellent forage value in the fall and winter.

"Although fescue has its share of drawbacks, it has been a great farm resource for cattle producers," said Schnakenberg.

Because it is a cool-season forage, fescue can stay in good condition throughout the winter.

In October, new growth can test as high as 20 percent protein. According to Schnakenberg, fescue will drop only about two percentage points a month through the winter, unless

there is heavy ice early in the winter.

"I think most farmers would rather graze their cows or horses on high quality 15 to 20 percent protein fescue than to buy and feed eight percent protein hay throughout the entire winter. Grazing fescue can dramatically cut the feed bill down over the winter," said Schnakenberg.

Schnakenberg has compared the numbers and says it can cost twice as much to feed a cow herd with average quality hay and grain than to ration out fertilized fescue pasture.

"The fewer days you have to bring the feed to the cows, involving time and tractor fuel, the less it's going to cost the farmer," said Schnakenberg.

Fescue can be efficiently grazed using a technique called Management-intensive Grazing. With this type of grazing the farmer has several smaller pastures for grazing, closes gates to give unused pastures a rest, and rations the grass.

Another approach is to ration the fescue by strip-grazing, using a temporary fence that is moved every few days to give the cows only what they need without wasting the grass. Δ