Fescue Endophyte Problems

ELDON COLE

MT. VERNON, MO.

In the recent beef research update from Tom Troxel, University of Arkansas he summarized a study from Mississippi State and the Noble Foundation. The study looked at steer performance on Kentucky-31 E+ fescue with a 78 percent infection rate of the ergot alkaloid producing endophyte.

The above fescue was compared during spring and autumn grazing periods during two years. The other fescues were described as elite tall fescues with novel (friendly) endophytes. What caught my eye was the steers were finished at Macedonia, IA. That's likely the same lot our Missouri feedout steers are currently in. Here's the summary statements.

• Steers on the KY-31 pasture had a greater rectal temperature (103° F) following the 84 day spring grazing period. A normal temp is 101.5°.

• Spring hair coat scores were greatest on KY-31 at day 56 and 84.

• Steer average daily gain was 1.2 lbs. in the spring and 1.1 lbs. in the fall for the KY-31 E+ pastures.

• Gains on the elite tall fescue and novel endophyte combinations in the spring recorded gains of 2.24 down to 1.98 lbs.

• Exposure to fescue toxicosis did not affect carcass traits.

• Hair coat price discounts applied for spring grazed steers on KY-31 with toxic endophyte affected initial steer monetary value.

• There were no pasture differences for finishing costs or final carcass value.

The findings support that grazing "hot" fescue can reduce gains and feeder cattle market value. They state that producers who graze "hot" KY-31 should consider retaining ownership through the finishing phase to avoid market discounts and capture value from compensatory gains during finishing. Δ

ELDON COLE: Extension Livestock Specialist, University of Missouri