



Dr. Stacey Hamilton, University of Missouri Extension dairy specialist, at left, explains the new novel endophyte variety trial to a group of farmers at the Southwest Center, Mt. Vernon.

Fescue School, March 21, Linneus, To Show Novel Endophyte Benefits

LINNEUS, MO.

North Missouri beef producers have extra reasons to plant a new novel-endophyte fescue variety, say University of Missouri forage specialists.

The toxin-free fescues make higher grass yields north of Interstate 70 than in the Ozarks, says Craig Roberts, MU Extension specialist.

"High yields mean more opportunity for better livestock gains," he adds.

Producers can learn more on planting and maintaining novel endophytes at a special fescue school March 21 at the MU Forage Systems Research Center, Linneus.

The schools are copied after grazing schools held statewide. Their aim is to replace toxic stands of Kentucky 31 tall fescue with a new fescue.

Five seed companies offering new novel-endophyte fescues formed an alliance to teach producers new management practices. Specialists from MU and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service provide instruction.

Producers must manage the toxic fescue to reduce damage to livestock. The old fescue cuts daily gains, harms reproduction, and adds heat stress in summer and fescue-foot in winter.

The new fescues require management as well, Roberts said. "Cattle like the new fescue so much they will graze it into the ground."

MU has side-by-side plots of the new fescues being grazed. The plots are at Linneus and MU Southwest Center, Mount Vernon, Mo.

The new varieties gain added value in northern Missouri for herd owners who stockpile fescue grass for winter grazing.

Stockpile grazing shortens long winter hay-feeding seasons, Roberts says. To gain the most forage, nitrogen fertilizer must be added in mid-August. But adding N boosts toxicity levels in old varieties.

"Stockpiling with novel-endophyte fescues present low risk," Roberts adds.

Plant breeders worked for years to develop grazing-friendly fescues. Now they are widely available.

Tall fescue is the most common grass grown in Missouri pastures.

The new varieties come at a time of rising feed costs, but also increased cattle value.

The schools will devote time to proven methods of killing old fescue stands. "K-31 is tough to eradicate, but it must be removed from pastures before a new variety is seeded," Roberts says. "Given a choice, livestock will graze the new variety. That allows the old variety to come back."

Producers must follow a spray-smother-spray method for success, Roberts adds. "We want producers to be successful – and gain more dollar returns from pastures."

The school starts at 10 a.m. and ends by 5 p.m. For enrollment details at FSRC, contact Tamie at 660-895-5121 or Car-Ta@missouri.edu.

A similar school will be held March 19 at the MU Southwest Center, 417-466-2148.

A registration fee covers lunch, breaks and a notebook of materials.

The fescue research is in the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. Δ

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