

Meadow Fescue Provides High Feed Quality

URBANA, ILL.

Graziers looking to grow a "new" grass need to consider meadow fescue. This cool-season perennial grass is one the species discussed in the University of Wisconsin leaflet titled Forage Fescues in the Northern USA.

The grass comes mainly from northern Europe and mountainous regions of southern Europe. It was introduced to the United States and Canada in the early 1800's. A meadow fescue breeding program was started in the 1990's at the University of Wisconsin.

Meadow fescue is well suited to frequent, managed grazing, but not as well suited as taller grasses to hay management systems.

One of the most important traits of meadow fescue is its high feed quality, according to University of Wisconsin researchers. Varieties tested have been consistently higher in neutral detergent

fiber digestibility than certain tall fescue and orchardgrass varieties.

While tall fescue endophytes (naturally occurring fungus in the plant cells) produce both protective and harmful alkaloids, the meadow fescue endophyte produces only the protective alkaloids that contribute to heat and drought tolerance. Because of this, meadow fescue shows none of the detrimental effects on livestock that can be caused by other fescues. Meadow fescue can not be infected by the tall fescue endophytes.

Meadow fescue appears to be more tolerant to cold temperatures than tall fescue and festulolium (hybrid cross of ryegrass and tall fescue).

In summary, meadow fescue is a high quality, drought and cold tolerant perennial grass adapted to a managed grazing program. Δ