SUMMER 2022

TRI-COUNTY LIVESTOCK NEWSLETTER

Serving residents of Anson, Stanly and Union County

IN THIS ISSUE

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Upcoming Events

Title: Union County Cattlemen's Association Annual Meeting
Description: For more details, contact Rachel Owens
Date: 8/18/2022

Title: Graded Feeder Cattle Sale
Description: Stanly County Livestock Market- https://www.norwoodfeedercalf.com/
Date: 8/4/22

Title: Stanly County Youth Classic Goat and Heifer Show
Description: Held at American Legion Post 76. For more information or to register contact Katelyn Stegall.
Date: August 20, 2022

Title: Anson County Heifer Show
Description: For more information and to register, contact Kinsey Everhart
Date: August 27, 2022

Title: Union County Livestock Show
Description: Held at the Simpson Events Center- 307 Cultivation Circle Monroe, NC 28112. For more information and to register, contact Rachel Owens.
Date: September 17, 2022

For any meeting or program listed, persons with disabilities may request accommodations to participate by contacting the Extension Office where the meeting will be held by phone, email, or in person at least 7 days prior to the event.

NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION N.C. A&T STATE UNIVERSITY NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Fescue Toxicity in Beef Cattle

by Kinsey Everhart

Tall fescue is one of the most important pasture grasses in the US and in our region. Tall fescue has the potential to be a highly nutritious forage that should result in good animal performance. However, tall fescue has gained a reputation for poor gains and reproduction problems in cattle and horses. Mares on tall fescue often abort, produce dead foals, have foaling difficulties, or fail to produce milk. There are three separate syndromes associated with tall fescue: fescue foot, bovine fat necrosis, and fescue toxicity or summer slump.

The focus of this article will be on fescue toxicity because it is the most common and economically important syndrome in cattle consuming tall fescue. Fescue toxicity is characterized by poor animal gains, reduced conception rates, intolerance to heat, failure to shed the winter coat, and elevated body temperature. While the visual symptoms tend to be seen in warmer climates, this syndrome occurs throughout the regions where tall fescue is grown.

In 1977, the USDA Russell Research Center reported a fungus inside the grass and suspected it was associated with the syndrome. Grazing trials confirmed this susception when animals grazed a fungus free tall fescue. The fungus that is associated with the toxicity and lives within the plant is an endophyte and called Neotyphium coenphialum. This endophyte produces ergot alkaloids that can be highly toxic to livestock.

Externally, cattle show poor growth. Beef steer daily gains on endophyte-free tall fescue are typically 50 to 100% more than when on grass with high rates of toxic endophyte infestation. Steers on endophyte free grass are tolerant to heat, graze throughout the day, shed their winter coats in the spring, and are more active than those on toxic endophyte infected grass. Symptoms increase with higher temperatures, but gains are poor throughout the year on toxic endophyte tall fescue.

Beef cattle on toxic endophyte infected tall fescue are often caked in mud and spend excessive amounts of time in shade or water. Conception rates may be reduced especially in first time heifers. Calf weight gains are decreased as a result of both reduced milk production and consumption of the forage by calves.

The ergot alkaloid level in toxic endophyte infected hay is usually only around half the level of the green forage. Likewise, stockpiled toxic endophyte-infected tall fescue will contain toxins, but levels are much lower during the fall growth period.

The endophyte and the grass have a symbiotic relationship. The endophyte does not harm the grass. In fact, the grass provides food and protection to the endophyte. In return, the endophyte helps the plant survive and compete with other plants in stressful environments. Infected fescue is more drought tolerant than endophyte-free plants. Also, the infection increases seed germination rate, seedling vigor, tiller growth, seed production, mineral uptake, resistance to some diseases, insects, and nematodes. This results in a persistent and competitive plant species great for pastures.

Planting endophyte free tall fescue ensures animal performance. Unfortunately, these pastures lack vigor and the benefits associated with the endophyte. Novel (non-toxic) endophyte technology offers a unique solution to tall fescue toxicity problems. These endophytes do not produce toxic alkaloids, but provide the same benefits to the plant as toxic endophyte strains.

There are several management strategies to mitigate toxicity symptoms other than pasture renovation. For more information on practical solutions to the toxicity problem contact your local cooperative extension agent.

Looking Ahead to Stockpiling Fescue Pastures

by Katelyn Stegall

With temperatures increasing and summer in full swing, winter grazing is probably the furthest thing from your mind as a livestock producer. However, it is not too early to start thinking about stockpiling those cool-season pastures for winter grazing. Grazing stockpiled pastures in the winter will extend your grazing season, and cut down on costs associated with hay feeding in the winter. Now is the time to be thinking ahead about how to get pastures ready for stockpiling in late summer/early fall.

Tall fescue is the predominant grass in pastures in this area. Tall fescue is an excellent choice for stockpiling because of its drought and frost resistance and maintained digestibility and palatability.

Again, it is not too early to be thinking about stockpiling fescue for winter grazing. Keep an eye on pastures you are currently grazing but plan to stockpile, so as to not overgraze them and cause a decreased yield during the fall growing season. Leave a minimum of 3-4 inches residual if grazing tall fescue pastures during early to mid-summer.

Mid to late summer is the time to start really preparing your pastures to stockpile tall fescue. In August, graze or mow fescue pastures down to 3-4 inches. Early August into September is when tall fescue will start putting on new growth. Accumulation in this time frame is very important, especially if rain is in short supply. This is also the time for the application of nitrogen fertilizer to increase fall growth. 50 lbs/acre is common but apply based on soil recommendations if you have them for best results. Take into consideration current prices and your individual situation before making fertilizer decisions. Be careful that you are not fertilizing too early as applications before mid-August can cause warm-season weed growth that can hinder growth of cool season forages.

When fescue pastures start putting on new growth in late summer/early fall, it is important not to harvest or graze them until November or December. This ensures that you will have the best stand possible for grazing in the winter months, and if managed well these pastures could be grazed into February.

You should be thinking now about what you need to do to get ready to stockpile fescue. For questions about stockpiling fescue for winter grazing, contact your local extension agent!

Record Keeping for Livestock Farms

by Rachel Owens

Keeping records of your livestock operation is incredibly important, regardless if you raise animals for profit or for hobby. If your goal is to make a profit, then knowing which animals are the most productive and how your inputs and expenses are impacting your bottom line can make or break an operation. Hobby livestock enthusiasts can improve the quality of their care for their animals by knowing their animal's health history in detail.

I once had a producer ask me to help him decide what cows he needed to cull as he was downsizing his herd. But he could not recall which cows produced a calf in the last few years, nor even tell which cow was which as many were missing ear tags. Without knowing which cows were the most productive, it was challenging to decide which ones needed to stay and which ones should go.

You can measure and keep records on so many aspects of your farm. How do you know what to keep track of? Start with determining your goals and then decide what records will give you the most relevant and important information needed. A cow-calf producer is most concerned with producing pounds of calves. Some record types that would be most relevant include birth dates, weights, and calving rate. A goat dairy will want to keep track of milk production levels of individuals. All livestock farms should keep track of medications, parasite control, and treatments for animals. The product, date administered, and dosage are all important records to keep.

Writing things down is only so helpful. Being able to find these records at a later date to be able to reference them and make decisions from the information is equally important. If keeping records using pen and paper, make sure you have a place to store everything together such as a folder or binder. Leaving receipts on the dashboard, scraps of paper in pockets, and other such locations results in lost documents and lots of frustration. There are digital options such as using a spreadsheet or word document. There are plenty of templates available online to help you easily organize information. There are also options for the phone through apps. This allows you to easily take down records chute-side or in the barn. Find whatever method works for your preferences and capabilities.

Every operation regardless of size or type can benefit from proper record keeping. Determine what types of records benefit you and find a way to record and store this information so you can make the best decisions for your farm and animals.