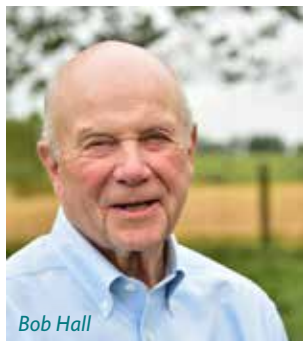


MANAGE FESCUE TOXICITY

A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO *RANGE & PASTURE STEWARD*

Stockers benefit from fescue management



If Bob Hall has his way, he never sees a fully developed fescue seed head on his farm.

The Georgetown, Kentucky, stocker operator does have predominately Kentucky 31 fescue pastures. He has experience with toxic endophyte-infected fescue and its effect on cattle.

He's heard the researchers say there's five times more toxin in the mature seed head than in the leaves and stems.

"We try not to let fescue go to seed anywhere," Hall says. "Otherwise, the cattle get hot and stay in the shade instead of grazing."

Stocker gains go south in a big way, too — not what he has in mind.

Hall will turn 350 stockers through 110 acres of pasture. It's an eight-month grazing system, from mid-March to late November. He adds cattle as grass increases and delivers them as they hit target weight.

Cattle come in weighing 600 to 625 pounds and leave at 825 to 875 pounds.

"I do this all by myself, so I want healthy cattle," he explains. Lighter calves carry more risk of health problems that might require doctoring.

The cattle deal isn't Hall's day job. For more than 50 years, that's been leading Hallway Feeds, Lexington, Kentucky, which specializes in equine nutrition. The company has fueled 11 Kentucky Derby winners.

At home, though, Hall is the cattleman he's been all his life, on the farm where he was raised. Last year, his stockers generated 750 pounds gain per acre. That's a function of management.

GRASS AND GRAZING MANAGEMENT

While Hall's predominant grass is KY31 fescue, those pastures also have orchardgrass and bluegrass. About every three years, he'll frost-seed red clover at 6 pounds pure live seed per acre, typically about March 1. It costs about \$20 an acre, he says, "But you can get that back several times because of the improved cattle gain."

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Stockers benefit from fescue management

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Hall started rotational grazing about 20 years ago. He keeps the stockers in two herds, one of 65 to 70 head and another of 120 to 130. Each herd rotates through its own five or 10 pastures. Both herds have access to one more.

Hall moves the cattle depending on grass growth. The big herd typically moves every three or four days, the smaller herd every six or seven days. On average, he figures 65 cattle will properly graze 1 acre per day.

"If there's 6 inches of grass left when I move, then the cattle were in there a day too long," Hall says. "The more you leave, the quicker you can come back because the grass grows faster."

"If you can't graze a field in a week, the field is too big or you don't have enough cattle."

That rapid rotation is Hall's first defense against mature fescue seed heads. Intensive grazing keeps fescue seed heads from forming or, if they begin to form, allows cattle to consume seed heads early in the boot stage. At that point, seed heads are still low in toxicity.

Hall wants uniform grazing across a pasture. That's a benefit of his intensive rotational grazing — usually.

"If they didn't eat something the first time, they're not going to eat it the next time through," he says. "So I mow, and it's all uniform. But, I try to put enough cattle in there so I don't have to mow."

WEED CONTROL AND SEEDHEAD SUPPRESSION

Hall's other option for managing seed heads comes in combination with his weed control. For several years, he used Chaparral™ herbicide to control weeds and suppress fescue seed heads.

"You can grow weeds or you can grow grass," he says. "You get more gains growing grass."

"The main thing you see with Chaparral is the grass stays in a vegetative state. It improves the grazing, and the grass is grazed more uniformly."

He typically applies Chaparral between April 20 and May 1, after pastures have been grazed, before boot stage.

The herbicide will kill clover growth for at least the spring, but it's a trade-off for weed control. A year after herbicide application, his clover seeding works fine. In 2017, Hall followed the herbicide application with urea fertilizer at 125 pounds per acre.

"That really increased the [grass] production and made up for any clover I was going to grow," Hall says. "I believe



this will work. The grass doesn't have a chance to get stunted, and it comes out fast."

PASTURE CONVERSION

Also in 2017, Hall began the process of converting KY31 fescue pastures to novel endophyte fescue. A year earlier, he established novel endophyte fescue following soybeans on a new farm he bought. He's used both MaxQ fescue and BarOptima Plus E34 fescue.

In these new varieties, different, beneficial endophytes replace the one in KY31 that causes toxicity. Seed companies tout the new fescues for better stand persistence than endophyte-free varieties and improved cattle performance compared to KY31.

To replace existing KY31 stands with the novel endophyte fescue, Hall sprayed in the spring with Chaparral™ herbicide to control weeds and suppress fescue seedheads. After summer grazing, he sprayed the fescue with glyphosate on Aug. 10 and again Sept. 1. He drilled the BarOptima into the sod soon after.

"Weed control is important," Hall says. "You want to get a field cleaned up before you go any further. Then the only thing to kill [with glyphosate] is the grass."

Hall hopes to have a stand to graze by late in the summer of 2018. He's looking forward to it, based on his experience with his first stands following the soybeans.

"I like the BarOptima a little better," Hall says of his first stands. "It has a narrower, finer leaf that's softer."

In 2017, Hall weighed a handful of steers after 100 days on his first stand of BarOptima. In that period, they averaged 2.9 pounds average daily gain. That's 0.75 to 1 pound per day better compared to his KY31, he says.

"They were out grazing when cattle in other pastures were in the shade," he says. ■



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