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Forage News

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## Forage News [2022-05]

Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, University of Kentucky

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# Forage News

## Keeping Forage-Livestock Producers in Kentucky Informed

Dr. Ray Smith and Krista Lea, editors

May 2022

### Looking for a Monthly Magazine FULL of Grazing Articles?

The Stockman Grass Farmer is an excellent print and digital monthly publication that provides great pasture and grazing articles written by graziers, who make their living from grassland based agriculture with every possible species that can be raised on pasture.

Articles cover the ART & SCIENCE of making a profit from grassland agriculture while prioritizing regenerative soil health. If you aren't familiar with The Stockman Grass Farmer, you can request a free sample issue on line at [www.stockmangrassfarmer.com](http://www.stockmangrassfarmer.com), or call 800-748-9808.

**THE STOCKMAN**  
**Grass Farmer**  
Our 74th Year — Since 1947

### Coping with Fertilizer Prices

Most of you know the many advantages that we have as graziers and forage producers in Kentucky. But with the sky high price of fertilizer (which row crop producers require annually), now is an ideal time to appreciate that management intensive rotational grazing makes us not nearly as vulnerable to high fertilizer prices. Rotationally grazed livestock harvest their own feed and spread their own manure and urine. The urine alone contains high levels of nitrogen and over 80% of the potassium that the animal consumes from the forage. The livestock, the soil and the enterprise all benefit. That's a great message and one that we should all be promoting!

~ Bill Payne, retired dairy producer, grazing consultant, and KFGC board member.

### Crabgrass and a Living Legend

Crabgrass is a summer annual grass that can be a valuable part of a full season grazing and hay program in Kentucky. Crabgrass is highly palatable and is well adapted to Kentucky although it is often thought of as a weed. It has often been part of Kentucky pastures, especially those that have been overgrazed. The advent of improved varieties of crabgrass has changed the perception of crabgrass as an opportunistic weed to a valuable high quality forage. This article is an update on the varieties available, quick establishment tips and a bit about the family behind the improved varieties of crabgrass.

Crabgrass can be established using a prepared seedbed, but it also has value as a renovation forage for tall fescue pastures, especially areas that have been disturbed by hay feeding or livestock trampling. Crabgrass will make good use of the soil nutrients left behind in hay feeding areas. These areas are ideal for the introduction of crabgrass because the soil is already disturbed. Crabgrass establishes best when it is worked into the soil between ¼ to ½ inch deep. No-till seedings are possible but depth control is critical.

For renovation, crabgrass should be broadcast at 3 to 6 lb/acre onto disturbed sod and rolled with a cultipacker. Chain harrowing after seeding can help cover the seed, which is essential for successful establishment. Seed may need to be mixed with a carrier such as pelletized lime to flow through spinner seeders. It is critical to check the spread of crabgrass seed as it typically only travels half as far as a carrier. Crabgrass can be seeded with red clover for additional yield and forage quality. For more information on using crabgrass for forage, see UK publication AGR-232 Crabgrass. To get to the online version quickly, type 'crabgrass uky' into your web browser.

The driving force behind improved crabgrass varieties is one man, R.L. Dalrymple. RL spent a career at the Noble Foundation doing applied research and extension on pasture and grazing systems. Growing up he observed how his parents had used crabgrass for forage on their west central Oklahoma farm. As part of his Noble Foundation efforts, R.L. selected and released 'Red River' as a public variety in 1988 and he has released other varieties as shown below. All of these improved crabgrasses are erect, high yielding, high quality annual forages.

**Red River.** The original improved variety, released by Noble Foundation as a public release. There are known problems with uncertified seedlots, so it is best to specify Certified seed.

**Impact.** Derived from Red River at the Noble Foundation, this variety was selected to grow longer into the fall. Barenbrug has the marketing rights. Impact is a component of the commercial blend 'Mojo'.

**Dal's Big River®.** A refinement and improvement over Red River only available as trademarked, certified Seed. Red River and Dal's Big River have rough seed coats that can have variable amounts of 'fuzz' making the seed flow poorly through spinner spreaders and conventional seeding equipment. As noted above, carriers help seed flow.

## Forage Timely Tips: May

- ✓ Start hay harvests for quality forage. Consider making baleage to facilitate timely cutting.
- ✓ Seed warm season grasses for supplemental forage once soil temperature is at 60 F.
- ✓ Clip, graze, or make hay to prevent seedhead formation.
- ✓ Rotate pastures as based in height rather than time.
- ✓ Consider temporary electric fencing to subdivide larger pastures and exclude areas for mechanical harvesting.
- ✓ Scout pastures for summer annual weeds and control when small.

**Quick-N-Big®.** Quick-N-Big was released in 2010 and was selected to germinate earlier and provide quicker earlier growth than Red River or Dal's Big River. It is very upright in its growth habit.

**Quick-N-Big Spreader®.** Released in 2016, this variety is much like Quick-N-Big except it tends to root more around the crown, if there is space to spread. Quick-N-Big and Quick-N-Big Spreader have smooth seed coats and flow more readily than Red River and Dal's Big River.

**Mojo.** Mojo is a commercial blend of Impact and Red River varieties, owned and distributed by Barenbrug. Mojo is only available as coated seed, and the coating comprises 50% of the bag. Coating greatly improves the ability of the crabgrass to flow through drills and spread from spinner seeders.

Crabgrass usage in Kentucky is growing, such as producing grass finished beef at Michael Palmer's farm in Marshall County. Having a high quality summer grass alternative that can complement tall fescue is a valuable option.

I am sure R.L. would be work pretty hard to deflect any accolades for this work. Yet accolades are due. In my opinion he is one of the legends of forage agriculture, both for improved crabgrasses as well as a career of contributions to farmers and ranchers. And it is a privilege indeed to know a living legend. ~ Dr. Jimmy Henning, originally published in Farmer's Pride.

### Pub of the Month: Fescue Toxicosis

This is an important publication right now since May and June are when the toxins in tall fescue are at their highest. Authored by UK's Drs. Arnold, Gaskill, and Smith, it explains fescue toxicity and describes the ways you can manage around this issue on your farm. The last part of the publication describes the sampling methods and labs to send fescue samples to determine how much endophyte is in your field and the level of toxin (ergovaline) that is present. To access this publication go to the UK Forage Website under Livestock Disorders or the direct link for this publication <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ID/ID221/ID221.pdf>

### Pub of the Month: Managing Legume-Induced Bloat in Cattle

White and red clover in pastures reduces the impact of fescue toxicosis, provides free

**see blue.**

nitrogen, and improves pasture quality and animal performance. These are huge benefits, but bloat can be a concern. This is a valid concern, but this publication describes simple steps that every producer can take to reduce the risk of bloat. It also describes how bloat occurs and the symptoms to watch for. Special thanks to Dr. Jeff Lehmkuhler for taking the lead in writing this publication. To access this publication go to the UK Forage Website under Livestock Disorders or the direct link for this publication <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/id/id186/id186.pdf>

### Novel Endophyte Fescue Conversion begins in the spring

Kentucky 31 (K31) tall fescue is without question the dominant forage species and variety in Missouri and the eastern U.S. and it is for good reason. E.N. Fergus, forage specialist from the University of Kentucky in the 1930s and 1940s, did a great favor for the livestock industry, when he propagated K31 fescue.

Fescue in general is palatable with outstanding quality at early growth. It can tolerate abusive grazing better than most other forages and survives drought, diseases, insects and cold weather. Fescue provides a consistent amount of fall and winter grazing very cheaply and better than any other perennial forage we grow. The seed is readily available and it is easy to establish.

Despite all the positive benefits of K31 fescue, the obvious downside is the endophyte and the toxicity created by it for livestock that affects performance.

Forage specialists do not promote replacing K31 fescue completely. However, livestock producers who learn how to use it and/or supplement their forage

systems with other forage options, are ahead of the curve on dealing with the drawbacks. Too many Missouri livestock producers depend solely on K31 fescue for pasture and hay. **(continued on page 3)**

### Upcoming Events (see Forage website for details and to register, click on EVENTS)

June 16—Equine Farm and Facilities Expo, Lexington, KY

Aug 11—Eastern KY KFGC Field day, Quicksand, KY

Oct 3-6 Eastern Native Grass Symposium, Louisville

October—KY Grazing Conference

Nov 14-17—World Alfalfa Conference, San Diego, CA

May 14-19, 2023—International Grassland Congress, Covington, KY

Subscribe or access full articles at the UK Forage Website [www.forages.ca.uky.edu](http://www.forages.ca.uky.edu). Go to the forage website to access the "KY Forages YouTube Channel" for recordings of recent KY forage conferences.



Novel fescue has the potential to significantly impact animal performance and farm profitability and some outstanding novel fescue brands are now on the market. Research out of Arkansas has found significant results in cow reproduction rates by converting just 25 percent of a farm operation to novels coupled with careful management.

Another good reason for a renovation of a fescue pasture is when there are many grassy weeds that have dominated a pasture or paddock. There are many pasture and hayfield stands that once were strong fescue fields, but aren't anywhere close to that anymore. In most cases, there are no selective herbicides to eliminate or reduce less desirable species in a field and a complete renovation may be the only solution if a purer stand is desired. These grasses may include foxtail, nimblewill, broomsedge, purpletop and panic grass.

If a producer is starting with an existing stand of K31 fescue and intends to convert it to novel endophyte fescue, special measures to insure complete K31 elimination are highly recommended. Fescue seed can stay viable in the ground for at least 12 months so it is imperative to prevent seed production from the old K31 crop during the year of establishment.

If a producer is spending the extra money for novel seed and incorporating recommended steps to convert out of K31, we want to do everything possible to make it successful. This includes following preliminary steps to fully eliminate K31 crowns from surviving and planting at the best time of year. In most cases, a late-summer or early fall seeding is the most ideal. Unless conditions are too dry, this is usually during the month of September. There are at least two recommended methods for the conversion process. The most common method is to do a spray-smother-spray approach that involves a kill of the old fescue in the spring with heavy rates of glyphosate, then planting a summer annual smother crop followed by a second spray of glyphosate in the late summer prior to novel fescue planting. Summer annual options may be sorghum sudangrass, millet, teff or corn for silage or grain.

The first method is clearly the most expensive and time-consuming approach. However, another method to consider would be to do a spray-wait-spray approach. This involves not allowing the spring growth of K31 to go to seed, then spraying it out with a high rate of glyphosate in late June/early July. Instead of planting a smother crop, the field is left fallow for the summer. Then a couple weeks or less before later summer/ fall planting, do a second glyphosate spray. Missouri research has found that this method is also effective in eliminating any K31 resurgence in the new stand.

Many will see the price of seed and think it's just not worth it. Work done by ag economists out of Missouri and North Carolina have studied this issue closely. There are farms that have weaning weight data on calves that show major improvements in gain after cattle started grazing novel fescues. In some cow-calf operations it may take up to five years to get a full pay-back from the process in improved animal performance. But if fields are already in need of renovation to start with and are unproductive, then the pay-back starts at three years. If the plan is to only convert up to 25 percent of the farm to novels, the payoff can occur in about two years.

There are many factors that come into play when deciding if this is something a producer should consider. There are decades of research data that have shown that the fescue endophyte is a significant reducer of on-farm profit in the cattle business. Unfortunately, many producers do not recognize the quiet siphoning off of profits that occurs in a cow herds as a result of the endophyte.

This tool of using novel fescue for addressing the problem, combined with other measures, can be a huge benefit for a farm operation. There are farms that have weaning weight data on calves that show major improvements in gain after cattle started grazing novel fescues. Contact your nearest extension field specialist in agronomy if you have specific questions on how to convert to a novel fescue.

~ Tim Schnakenberg, Field Specialist Missouri, see more info on novel fescue at <https://grasslandrenewal.org/>