

FORAGE

Alliance provides seed quality control

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A producer establishing new tall fescue stands with one of the nontoxic (novel)-endophyte-infected tall fescue varieties needs assurance that the seed actually contains viable nontoxic endophyte. Laboratory tests are now available that can detect the presence or absence of endophyte in

the seed as well as determine if the endophyte present is a nontoxic or toxic endophyte (one that produces ergot alkaloids that cause tall fescue toxicosis). With nontoxic-endophyte-infected tall fescue varieties, part of the seed cost is for the endophyte. The endophyte in seed is fragile and can lose its viability if improperly stored and, when planted, results in an endophyte-free stand that is not as persistent as an endophyte-infected stand. Endophyte-free tall fescue varieties provide excellent animal performance with no tall fescue toxicosis, but endophyte-free stands

are not as persistent as endophyte-infected stands. Tall fescue varieties that contain a nontoxic endophyte provide both good animal performance and good stand persistence.

Seed companies incur additional costs in the processing, packaging and storing of nontoxic-endophyte-infected tall fescue seed to ensure that the purchased seed contains a viable endophyte. This additional cost may add two to four times to the seed price compared to endophyte-free or toxic-endophyte-infected tall fescue varieties.

In 2012, the Alliance for Grassland Renewal (grasslandrenewal.org) was formed, in part to make sure that producers are getting what they pay for when purchasing nontoxic-endophyte-infected tall fescue varieties. This Alliance, made up of university, government, industry and nonprofit groups, was started in Missouri to work toward the replacement of toxic-endophyte-infected tall fescue with nontoxic “novel”-endophyte-infected tall fescue varieties that would improve animal gain and performance.

The Alliance for Grassland Renewal educates producers on tall fescue toxicosis and methods to success-

fully establish nontoxic-endophyte-infected stands. A major component of the Alliance is the establishment of quality control standards for the new nontoxic-endophyte tall fescue varieties. A standard for seed purity is currently in place. Seed lots must contain 95 percent pure nontoxic “novel”-endophyte-infected seed with only 5 percent of “off-types” or toxic endophyte as well as meet standards for endophyte viability. Seed that meets this standard will receive an “Alliance Approved” sticker on the bag. This important quality standard means that when you purchase and plant “Alliance Approved” tall fescue seed, the resulting stand should be highly infected with a beneficial nontoxic “novel” endophyte.

Additional Alliance standards for animal safety and plant persistence are being developed. To be “Alliance Approved” for these standards will require a source of independent confirmation (a source other than the seed company marketing the seed, such as university trials) that the variety does not cause tall fescue toxicosis and will persist under grazing. If you are in the market for a tall fescue variety, look for the “Alliance Approved” sticker. ■