Alliance offers 1-day tall fescue renovation schools

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Tall fescue makes excellent perennial forage that can be used to fill the forage gap when warm-season grasses go dormant. Tall fescue is adapted to regions of greater rainfall such as eastern Oklahoma and the eastern states in the transition zone. Unfortunately, the dominant tall fescue (usually referred to as Kentucky 31) commonly used across the United States comes with one major problem: fescue toxicosis. Livestock grazing toxic tall fescue may have lowered animal production such as reduced weight gain, poor body condition, lowered reproductive rates and lowered milk production, and elevated body temperatures resulting in livestock standing in water or wallowing around the water trough (as shown in the photo). It might be hard to believe, but the grass doesn’t cause fescue toxicosis. A fungus, also known as an endophyte, which lives inside the grass, produces ergot alkaloids that are toxic to grazing livestock.

Over the years, producers have learned to manage fescue toxicosis by integrating other forages, monitoring grazing and supplementing feed. However, one option for eliminating fescue toxicosis is to replace your current tall fescue with a new variety infected with a strain of endophyte called nontoxic or “novel” endophyte that is unable to produce ergot alkaloids or only produces low levels. If you are thinking about replacing your pasture, there are a number of cultivar options available from Barenbrug, DLF International Seeds, Mountain View Seeds and Pennington Seed. Each cultivar has been bred for greater persistence and improved forage productivity, and each contains a livestock-safe endophyte strain. Example varieties are Jesup MaxQ®, Texoma MaxQ II®, Estancia with ArkShield®, Martin 2Protek® and BarOptima PLUS E34.
If you want to know more about replacing your toxic tall fescue, help is at hand. The Alliance for Grassland Renewal will host a novel tall fescue renovation school from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., March 28, in Welch, Oklahoma. Novel tall fescue renovation schools offer a great way to find out how you can overcome animal productivity issues that come with grazing toxic tall fescue and learn about the benefits of replacing your pastures with one of the new varieties even if you think you are managing your toxic tall fescue. The school will cover topics from fescue toxicosis, new pasture establishment, seed quality, seed drill calibration, management, products and incentives. One speaker will also give a first-hand account of how he renovated his properties and the benefits he has seen since he finished converting his farm in 2009.

The cost is $60 per person or $110 for couples. Enrollment is limited and must be made by March 22. Walk-ins will pay $15 extra. The fee covers all educational materials and lunch. Registration for the schools and other information can be found at grasslandrenewal.org/education.htm. If you can't make it to this event, there will be three other schools held on March 29, 30 and 31, in Missouri.