A major goal of the Noble Research Institute’s plant breeding program has been to develop a perennial cool-season forage that could provide producers an alternative to planting winter annuals, such as wheat or cereal rye, for grazing. Though this goal may seem narrow in focus, systems producing forages throughout the year would limit the need for feeding hay and/or reduce the need to plant cool-season annuals. This could lower overall production costs for producers.

Tall fescue is a cool-season perennial forage that can provide valuable forage from fall through spring for grazing livestock. Tall fescue generally needs at least 37 inches or more of annual rainfall for suitable production and persistence. Historically, in Oklahoma and Texas, this type of rainfall occurs east of Interstate 35. This creates a transition zone for tall fescue, which is adapted east of this zone but not to the west due to summer heat and drought.

However, some types of tall fescue possess a unique trait where the plant enters a period of dormancy to avoid the harsh summer conditions common to the Southern Great Plains. These types of tall fescue originate from the Mediterranean region of southern Europe and North Africa and are often referred to as Mediterranean or summer-dormant types. Summer-dormant types stop growth during summer in response to long days, high temperatures and dry conditions.

Chisholm is a new tall fescue release by the Noble Research Institute. It was developed with this unique trait of summer-dormancy. Chisholm summer-dormant tall fescue is an endophyte-free variety that can provide livestock producers with a persistent, perennial, cool-season grazing option that is adapted to the hot, dry summers typical west of Interstate 35 in Oklahoma and Texas.

Chisholm is capable of producing high-quality forage from autumn through spring suitable for grazing livestock before entering summer-dormancy. After four years of grazing Chisholm pastures on our research farms, cattle had similar average daily and total live-weight gains compared to cattle on graze-out wheat pasture. The net return per acre on Chisholm was also similar to the graze-out wheat system. Other potential benefits of this perennial forage include the reduction of soil erosion and the improvement of soil health. Chisholm summer-dormant tall fescue is commercially available at Warner Brothers Seed Company in Lawton, Oklahoma.