

## **Wisconsin - Meadow Fescue: The Forgotten Grass**

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In the early 1900s, before tall fescue was introduced to the U.S., meadow fescue was a major pasture crop east of the Mississippi River, with millions of acres of production in the mid-south. Most of those acres are long gone with the spread of its high-yielding cousin, tall fescue.

Hundreds of farms have been discovered on which meadow fescue survived intensive row cropping in the hilly, driftless (unglaciated) area of SW Wisconsin, NW Illinois, NE Iowa, and SE Minnesota. These populations of meadow fescue appear to have superior tolerance to drought, winter temperatures, shade, and diseases. Individual plants are capable of surviving for many years in some of these harsh environments. Agronomic, breeding, genetic, and ecological studies are underway to identify the origin, agronomic value, and adaptation of these populations. An improved meadow fescue variety has been developed from these plants which should be available for seed purchase by 2011.



*Dairy cattle grazing lush meadow fescue in a management-intensive rotational grazing system on Hidden Valley Farms, Inc., Mineral Point, WI.*