RESEARCH UPDATES

WISCONSIN - Animal Performance While Grazing Tall or Meadow Fescue with or without White Clover Mitch Schooler, Key Albrecht, Day Schooler, University of Wisconsin

Mitch Schaefer, Ken Albrecht, Dan Schaefer, University of Wisconsin

three year grazing trial (2010-2012) was completed at the University of Wisconsin, Arlington Agricultural Research Station, Beef Grazing site. The study was designed to evaluate the grass species of tall fescue or meadow fescue, and also to compare either of these grasses fertilized with urea or grown with white clover. The four pasture types (fertilized tall fescue, tall fescue plus white clover, fertilized meadow fescue, and meadow fescue plus white clover) were grazed by crossbred beef steers that weighed 575 lbs at the start of the grazing season. Animals were grazed under a similar rotational management plan for 188, 137, and 132 days in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Pasture treatments were 5.6 acres and replicated three times. All pastures were established in the spring of 2009.

When white clover was grown with either meadow fescue or tall fescue, it persisted in a similar fashion. In 2010, with adequate precipitation and a young age, white clover averaged 45% within the sward. However, in 2011 and 2012, the percentage of white clover decreased to 24 and 14% for the respective years. The addition of white clover increased animal average daily gain (ADG) by 0.55, 0.24, and 0.09 lbs/day for years 2010, 2011, and 2012, which is representative of white clover inclusion in the swards. Available forage at turn-in was decreased by 210, 170, and 30 lbs/ac for 2010, 2011, and 2012 when white clover was included in the sward. Cattle grazing meadow fescue gained 2.16 lbs/day, whereas cattle grazing tall fescue pastures had a daily gain of 1.84 lbs. Forage available at turn-in was lower for meadow fescue than for tall fescue pastures and was reduced by 220, 230, and 440 lbs/ac in years 2010, 2011, and 2012.





Data collected suggest both meadow fescue and tall fescue are suitable for Midwest pastures. Meadow fescue was not as productive as tall fescue, but because of increased steer ADG for meadow fescue, both meadow fescue and tall fescue had similar animal weight gain per acre. The addition of white clover to either grass provided a higher quality, more digestible forage which yielded greater weight gain, and greater animal gain per acre in 2010 and 2011, but not 2012. High quality pastures are essential to profitability when grazing growing livestock. Selecting a highly digestible pasture species can help reach this goal, but management of any pasture forage cannot be ignored.