FESCUE TOXICITY & RENOVATION SCHOOL
If you’ve not attended one of the “Novel Tall Fescue Renovation Schools” you should be interested in the one at the University of Missouri’s Southwest Research Center on March 29 from 9 am to 5 pm. The Center is southwest of Mt. Vernon. The physical address is 14158 State Road H.

During the school you’ll learn about fescue toxicosis; establishment and first-year management of novel fescue; long-term management’ company products; seed testing and you’ll hear from a producer panel of folks who have tried the novels.

If your cattle graze fescue or eat fescue hay there’s a pretty good chance you’re giving up some gain and/or reproduction efficiency. Sure, your grandpa or even great grandfather planted fescue in the 50’s and it’s been with you ever since. But you probably have some fields that need renovating. That will help you capitalize on the technology in the novel fescues.

Advanced registration is due March 22 at $60 per person or $110 per couple. Walk-ins will pay $75 and $125. This includes meal, refreshments and a proceedings. Call 417-466-3102 for details. The enrollment limit is 60.

BULL CLINICS
Here’s the schedule for the bull breeding soundness clinics in March. Not everyone can participate but they do create an awareness about the value of getting both old and young bulls checked ahead of the breeding season.

For those who do get bulls on the schedule it’s a money saver. Bulls are semen tested. They must have at least 70% of their sperm normal. The penis, prepuce and testicles are checked for injuries. The testicles are measured and must meet the standards for scrotal circumference.

During the process of getting the semen sample the accessory sex glands are palpated for normalcy. We score the bulls on body condition, feet and leg soundness and check their eyes and sometimes even their mouth. They receive their booster vaccinations, similar to what their female herd mates were given along and are treated for internal and external parasites.

For an added charge the bulls may be genomic tested. They should have a trichomoniasis test run on older bulls or those that have been running around with the wrong crowd. Here’s where we’ll have clinics.

- March 7 – Barry County Veterinary Services, Cassville, 417-847-2677
- March 15 & 16 – Dake Veterinary Clinic, Miller, 417-452-3301
- March 17 – Countryside Animal Clinic, Aurora, 417-678-4011
- March 23 – Christian County Veterinary Service, Clever, 417-743-2287
- March 24 – Animal Clinic of Diamond, Diamond, 417-325-4136

If you can’t get in a clinic you still need to have your bulls checked by a veterinarian. Look at the $30-$40 charge per bull as insurance. Don’t wait until the bull sales are over to learn your bull is like 10 to 15% of the bulls we check. Those 10 to 15% will delay or string out your 2017 calf crop. Strung out calf crops mean uneven and lighter weight calves. That’s not a good combination.

WE’RE NUMBER ONE!
Sometimes you don’t like to be Number 1 and this last feedout is one experience I hope we don’t have happen again. Last June we sent 72 steers to the Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity in southwest Iowa. Think back to June, 2015 when 650 pound steers were bringing about $240 per cwt. That’s $1593 per steer on our actual set-in price.

The steers were killed November 24 and December 29. When the initial price and all expenses were tallied up the steers lost an average of $609.56. Not one steer made any
money which prompted Darrell Busby, manager of TCSCF to write in his letter of condolence, “this is the worst loss I’ve experienced in my 33 years with the TCSCF program.”

Performance wise the cattle weren’t that bad. They were the victims of high feeder cattle prices which most feed calf producers enjoyed. You hear stories about other feeding losses so our feedout producers were in good company. I’ve heard of some folks losing up to $800 per head.

We did have 2 head die which hurts. Seventy percent of the steers graded low Choice or better which is about what we typically do. There were no heavily discounted carcasses. An area of performance that wasn’t good was the average daily gain of 3.14 pounds per day. Our summer gains have been running around 3.5 lbs. or even higher. What happened to the gains? I don’t know but I visited the lot in late June after they’d been there a month and there was evidence of heat stress. The lot did have sprinklers running but our steers showed a good bit of long, fescue hair still on them. As a rule last summer, I didn’t feel heat stress down here was as bad but for some reason the steers in Iowa suffered.

I’ll try to end on a positive note. If you want to learn about the genetics you’re putting in your cattle you need to participate in programs such as this. You’ll never get complete feedlot and carcass data returned if you don’t accept the risk of retaining ownership.

Steve Jones, Mt. Vernon had one steer die but the data he received showed that performance-wise he had the 1st, 4th, 5th, 7th and 8th retail value per days of age steers among the 69 that completed the trial. Steve’s entries were from an AI bull and his own natural service sire. I advised him upon seeing the results that he needed to collect the natural bull.

Our next feedout begins June 7. Entry deadline is May 10. If you are serious about improving the product you have there’s a feedout and genomic testing to help. Use them because your competition is or will soon.

**GENOMIC OR DNA TESTING**

Dr. Sally Northcutt and Bill Bowman of Method Genetics in St. Joe spoke at our Monett Beef Cattlemen’s Conference earlier this month. Their company is working to make EPD’s and genomic information available to the commercial cattle producer just as breed associations have it for registered breeders. They started by reminding us that beef cow-calf raisers tend not accept and use technologies as quickly as other livestock and crop enterprises. I think that’s true.

They pointed out the first item of business if you wish to use their programs you must have an individual animal identification system in place. I’ve mentioned this before that a simple 1, 2, 3, 4 tag becomes useless from a data computation standpoint. Most agree the international alphabet system, along with numbers works nicely once you get the hang of it. Remember, 2016 is D as found on page 3 of your Redbook.

Next, Bill and Sally said you need to know where you’re at regarding levels of performance. Do you want to increase growth rate, carcass quality grade, rib eye area? Most breed association’s use index systems and Method Genetics have three indexes that incorporate several EPDs and DNA results to give you a ranking as a selection tool.

The indexes are: Maternal Production Index that is likely of interest to those who sell calves at weaning. There is a Quality Pounds Index that focuses on feedlot and carcass performance. The third index is Retained Ownership Index which covers conception to carcass.

Some of you, mostly seedstock producers, have already become acquainted with using the blood cards. That seems to be preferred over tail switch hair. They recommend you collect a sample, even from day old calves. Be sure and let them dry thoroughly or they could mold and become useless. They could help you determine sires in multi-sire pastures. Someone even said they might help in cattle theft. I guess they could we just don’t know where this technology will take us.

Bill and Sally said the cost for their program ranges from $20 to $80 per head. You have to weigh the expected returns on this investment. As they neared the end of their presentation Bill said, “this technology will help make precision decisions.”

There’s a lot of homework involved in technology and some will go on producing average or below cattle. They showed examples of how their system allows you to compare your herd against other benchmark herds.

**MOLDY FESCUE**

Dr. Tim Evans from the University of Missouri’s College of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Lab spoke at the Crane Dairy Day. One question was can your lab check for molds in hays? His short answer was, “it’s seldom practical as there are just too many to test for.” We’ll see more questions like this due to the increased baleage interest. Cattle tend to sort through the forage as Dr. Evans indicated with relatively few problems other than the waste.