



Spraying flips fescue from problem to solution

At first, Dick and Betty Bryan didn't know what was wrong with their cattle. Then their research pointed to the fescue that had taken over some of their mixed grass pastures.

The Bryans had leased the grass for more than a decade as part of their 250-cow operation near Wellston, Oklahoma. But in recent, wetter years, fescue had begun to crowd out the bermudagrass.

"Ten years ago, there wasn't near that much fescue," Dick says. By 2014, though, the Bryans' cows were showing classic signs of fescue toxicity:

- Fuzzy hair coats in the summer
- Bad hooves and limping
- Reduced conception rates
- Lost tail switches

Bulls were among the first to show symptoms. One set of bulls turned out for heifers lost a substantial amount of weight in just two to three weeks on fescue. "Another bull lost his tail — the switch and more," Betty says.

"We call him Bob now," Dick adds.

Worse, though, was the decline in conception rates.

"We had 75 to 80 percent conception rates on fescue. Before, we were getting almost 100 percent," Betty says. "I keep good records, so we knew. I looked at the cows on fescue and said something's wrong."

Last spring, they considered killing the fescue with glyphosate and starting over with a new establishment of bermudagrass. "We hated to kill it, but we were having so many problems," Dick says.

Then they read about fescue seedhead suppression with Chaparral™ herbicide. Most of the toxic endophyte fungus

in fescue is in the seed head. Betty called Dow AgroSciences Range & Pasture Specialist Ron Courtney to discuss the idea. The Bryans decided to experiment.

NOVEL WAY TO MANAGE FESCUE

In mid-March, Dick applied Chaparral at the rate of 2 ounces per acre on 65 acres of fescue. He treated one pasture and a little more — "one sprayer load," he says. The Bryans buy their herbicide from Lincoln County Farm Center in Chandler, Oklahoma.

Courtney had warned the couple that the fescue might turn yellow for a period after spraying. Dick likened what he saw to the browning after he applies liquid fertilizer. After a rain, the fescue looked fine.

The visual signs of fescue toxicity — hair coats, bad hooves, limping, lost tails — didn't show in 2016. The fescue stayed in a vegetative state with few seed heads — or weeds. As a broad-spectrum weed and brush herbicide, Chaparral provided excellent weed control. From March through September, the 60-acre treated pasture carried 65 cows, even without its usual fertilization. "We just didn't get around to it," Dick admits.

The bigger mistake may have been not spraying more fescue last year, Betty says. The couple plans to do more in 2017. Without seed heads, the cool-season fescue makes a nice complement to the warm-season bermudagrass.

"It doesn't hurt bermudagrass, so we can go in a field and spray the whole thing," Dick says. "What I like about fescue is that it makes a lot of pasture. It makes early pasture and late pasture.

"I like it a lot better now that we can manage it." ■

Label precautions apply to forage treated with Chaparral and to manure from animals that have consumed treated forage within the last three days. Consult the label for full details.

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