

# First Year Management of Fescue Key to Long Stand Life

By Wayne Tankersley

Since its discovery in 1931, fescue has been widely used across the U.S. as pasture forage. Because of livestock performance problems with toxic fescue varieties and stand persistence issues with fungus free varieties, producers have looked at alternative forages in recent years for their production needs. However, the development and release of Jesup MaxQ - a non-toxic, persistent tall fescue variety- has rekindled interest in fescue and has many producers replacing old fescue stands with MaxQ or adding it into their grazing systems.

As with all newly established varieties of fescue, proper first year management is critical to insure a long productive stand life. There are strategies producers can employ to help insure a good healthy start for newly established fescue plantings.

**Apply recommended fertilizer** – Proper soil fertility is key to obtaining optimum growth and survivability of the fescue plant. Lime, phosphorus and potassium should be applied based on soil test results. For fall planted fescue, 60-80 lbs/A nitrogen should be applied just prior to the initiation of spring growth. (mid-February through mid-March). Spring planted fescue should receive 40-50 lbs/N at planting and another 50 lbs/A as a sidedress about 6 weeks after emergence.

**Grazing management** – Once plant growth reaches approximately 8 inches in height, fescue can and should be grazed. This prevents self-shading of plants and promotes plant tillering. During the year of establishment, fescue should not be grazed below a height of 3-4". Grazing newly planted fescue fields when excessively wet should be avoided as it leads to hoof "pugging" damage and stand loss. If practical, rest newly established pastures for a 3-4 week period during the hot summer months (mid to late July through mid to late August).

**Haying management** – Newly established fescue can be harvested for hay. To obtain the optimum combination of yield and quality, fescue should be harvested for hay at the early bloom stage of growth. When cutting for hay, leave at least 3" of plant stubble. Scalping fescue leads to stand loss and increased weed competition.

**Control weeds** – Weeds strongly compete with developing fescue plants for soil nutrients, moisture and space. Weeds should be kept in check by periodic mowing or with a timely application of an approved herbicide.



**To promote optimum plant growth and survival, do not mow or graze fescue below 3-4" during the establishment year.**

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