



Northern New York Agricultural Development Program News

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Photo available from karalynn@gisco.net

Direct link to research report: <http://www.nnyagdev.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/NNYADP2013CherneyFescueResReport.pdf>

Comprehensive Tall Fescue Trial Results Now Available from NNYADP: Tall Fescue Silage as Good as Alfalfa Silage

Northern New York -- Cornell University research has shown that tall fescue silage used in a well-balanced dairy ration can produce as much milk per cow as alfalfa silage. With northern New York cropland suited to the production of the cool-season grass, the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program (NNYADP) has funded a 40-variety trial - the most comprehensive tall fescue variety trial in the U.S.

The results of the latest NNYADP tall fescue variety trials evaluated by Cornell Crop and Soil Sciences Professor Jerry H. Cherney - are now available at www.nnyagdev.org.

"Tall fescue often ranks highest for yield among cool-season grass species grown in New York State," Cherney says. "It has survived northern New York winters and does not appear to have any persistence problems in the New York state."

Tall fescue is typically lower in crude protein than other grasses with the exception of timothy, but is similar in fiber concentration and quality making it suitable for inclusion in dairy cow rations.

The NNY trial, planted at the William H. Miner Agricultural Research Institute in Chazy, NY, included five Novel endophyte versions of some varieties. These varieties have a 'friendly' fungus that gives the plants added vigor.

The variety trials provided insight as to whether the extra cost to Northern New York farmers of the Novel variety seed would be warranted by return on investment in yield and quality compared to endophyte-free varieties.

"The Novel endophyte tall fescue varieties are essential in areas of the mid-South U.S. where certain physical and biological stresses are high. Here in Northern New York we have neither the very high summer temperatures nor any significant insect pressure, so there is no advantage for regional farmers in purchasing the relatively high-priced Novel endophyte varieties," Cherney says.

The research report posted on the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program website includes data on yield, milk per ton return potential, and other key

quality measures. FORVAL, a program developed by Dr. Gary Fick at Cornell University, uses current prices of protein/soybean meal, energy/corn grain, and hay to generate a dollar value for the protein and energy in the tall fescue forage. A new index was created to refine the measurement of forage quality.

Among the conclusions Cherney draws in his research report on the trial data from 2011-2013 is the suggestion that it is likely advantageous to select a later maturing grass variety when grass is planted as a companion with alfalfa.

Cherney suggests that farmers looking to plant a pure stand of tall fescue look for the highest GRASVAL/acre data as reflective of the best combination of both yield and quality.

“In a mixed stand, most producers are looking for a high proportion of alfalfa, with the highest possible NDFD for the grass at harvest (NDFD is an estimate of digestibility potential in the crop; high NDFD is found in the diets of high-producing milking cows). High grass yield potential may not be desirable, as this likely indicates a more competitive grass. Harvest date is usually based on alfalfa maturity, not on the tall fescue; therefore, if choosing a fescue variety to seed with alfalfa, simply select the variety in a trial with the highest NDFD at spring harvest,” Cherney explains.

Cherney notes research to develop optimal timing for spring harvesting of grass crops to significantly impact fiber digestibility, particularly with alfalfa-grass mixes, is a next step in advancing crop management for milk production value.

Cornell Willsboro Research Farm Manager Michael Davis and his farm crew provided hands-on management and harvesting of these NNYADP-funded tall fescue variety trials.

To learn more about dairy and crop production in Northern New York visit the NNYADP website at www.nnyagdev.org.



This forage specialist examines tall fescue in a USDA ARS test plot in Kimberley, ID; photo: USDA ARS/Ken Hammond.