

Removal of Tall Fescue from Kentucky Bluegrass Pastures

William W. Witt, Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, University of Kentucky

Introduction. Nearly all equine pastures in Kentucky have a tall fescue component and one can assume that all of the tall fescue is infected with the natural race of *Neotyphodium*, an endophytic fungus. Equine breeding farms are particularly sensitive to the endophyte infected tall fescue because of the reproductive problems often encountered when mares graze infected tall fescue. Elimination of tall fescue from desirable Kentucky bluegrass or orchardgrass pastures is the goal of many horse farms.

Tall Fescue Removal Option 1. In pastures with greater than 50% tall fescue, it may be desirable to kill all the grasses with glyphosate (Roundup or other glyphosate containing product) and seed a desirable grass. The optimum time for this approach is to apply glyphosate in mid July and seed desirable grasses in early September. It is important to have at least 4 weeks between glyphosate treatment and grass seeding—this allows the grasses killed by glyphosate to decay and not interfere with emergence of the seedling grasses.

Tall Fescue Removal Option 2. The other option is to selectively remove tall fescue with herbicides when the tall fescue infestation is less than 50%. Research at UK has shown good control from Plateau applied at 10 or 12 ounces/acre. Plateau must be applied with methylated seed oil or a non-ionic surfactant; consult the Plateau label for specifics. Tall fescue was controlled at these rates when applied from May through October. Two consecutive annual applications did not harm Kentucky bluegrass. Weekly mowing of the pasture did not reduce tall fescue control from Plateau applications. Cimarron at 1 ounce/acre will also remove tall fescue; however, the amount of tall fescue removal from Cimarron is less than that obtained with Plateau.

Issues - Orchardgrass. Care should be exercised when applying Plateau to orchardgrass. Under good growing conditions (warm, moist soil, warm air temperature) our research has revealed excellent tall fescue control without injury to the orchardgrass. However, under abnormally cool, dry conditions in early spring experienced near Lexington in 2005, orchardgrass injury was noted in some fields from treatment of Plateau.

Issues – Plateau and Cimarron Persistence in Soil. Follow the label directions for seeding pastures after Plateau or Cimarron applications. Under very dry conditions such as the summer of 2005, Plateau can persist in the soil and prevent germination and emergence of Kentucky bluegrass and orchardgrass. Consult the Plateau label for specific instructions.