

Missouri Red Angus Association

Fescue Belt Certified Program Announced

The Missouri Red Angus Associations Board of Directors recently approved the “Missouri Red Angus Association Fescue Belt Certified” program as an initiative designed to promote Missouri Red Angus members genetics.



Official MORAA Fescue
Belt Certification Logo

Many of us who live in the “fescue belt” have experienced the problems associated with importing newly purchased cattle into our environment. What we’ve seen is a significant percentage of cattle that have not been raised on fescue struggle to perform after being imported onto this “grass we love to hate”. Some animals eventually overcome this issue, but many will not and will eventually be culled from the herd.

Fescue toxicity results from toxins called ergot alkaloids, which are produced by a fungus called endophyte that grows within the fescue plant. Cattle experiencing fescue toxicosis may exhibit rough hair coats, heat stress, suppressed appetite, poor growth rates, reduced reproductive performance, and in some cases lost tail switches or even hooves. The decreased animal performance seen during the “summer slump” of cool-season pastures is made even worse by these toxic effects of fescue.

Research on the subject of fescue management has been done for years. Several strategies can be used to mitigate the toxic effects of fescue, including removal or suppression of seedheads, overseeding of pastures with legumes or other forages, and good mineral supplementation programs. However, fescue remains a serious challenge. The USDA estimates fescue toxicosis costs the U.S. beef industry an estimated \$600 million to \$1 billion annually in lost revenue because of reduced reproductive and growth rates in cattle herds.

Missouri beef producers recognize the value of selecting cattle that are adapted to fescue. In 2016, University of Missouri Extension Geneticist, Dr. Jared Decker, was awarded a \$3 million grant from the USDA to evaluate genetic differences in cattle among regions. Decker and his colleagues are utilizing DNA markers to study the interactions between cattle DNA and the environment. The study is focused on DNA, hair shedding, and tall fescue forage. When complete, the data will be used to design region-specific EPDs.

The entire state of Missouri is situated within the fescue belt. Since fescue was introduced into our region, Missourians have built their herds retaining only genetics that have proven to be “fescue tolerant.” When looking for Red Angus genetics, look for the MORAA FBC logo & cattle that have “**Bred-in Fescue Tolerance.**”