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## The Launch of \$Fescue

By now, I hope you've read or heard about the ~300 DNA samples tested for fescue tolerance using a test developed by AgBotanica. The American Shorthorn Association (ASA) and the Shorthorn Foundation funded this effort, but the project has really just begun for the breed. Now it's your turn!

If you have visited [www.agbotanica.com](http://www.agbotanica.com) or submitted a test prior to now, you'll find AgBotanica generates a Fescue Tolerance Star rating from 0 to 5 as well as a T-Snip™ Score ranging from 0 to 50 based on the number of DNA markers the animal possesses and their relative influence on fescue tolerance. The ASA will only be using the 0 to 50 T-Snip™ Score moving forward; the star rating uses simple rounding to condense 0 to 50 down to 0 to 5. It is important to note that the average score for the test population was 22, but the true breed average may be slightly different than that. Simple cowboy logic says that 25 seems reasonable, but again, we won't know until the test is used widely across the entire breed. Previous research suggested that animal location was a very poor predictor of fescue tolerance score. Our data reads the same. Breeders from outside the Fescue Belt can use this as a marketing tool to broaden their customer base. Breeders from inside the Fescue Belt can do the same, potentially marketing more tolerant genetics locally. This tool is the first of its kind; an index that targets environmental fit.

As I envisioned, the phone and inbox have been busy with questions regarding \$Fescue. Most generally, "What's in it?" and "How is it calculated?" seem to be popular. My answer for both questions is the same: It is nothing more than an attempt to mirror the British Maternal Index (\$BMI) in a toxic fescue environment. Since the economic weighting of traits used in the \$BMI calculation are sound (done independently by USDA), I decided to harness that index as the "base" for calculating \$Fescue. Certainly, toxic tall fescue causes economic losses from a number of angles, but fertility and maternal function are easily the most economically important, and \$BMI is our best method to categorize those cattle.

As with any other column on paper, there will be individuals that defy the norm. Management will still play a major role; acclimation period, body condition, adequate nutrition, mineral supplementation, and even access to a shade tree are still important. As cattle producers know, some cows just seem to thrive regardless of what grass is under their feet. Others may struggle no matter their zip code. However, my travels as a life-long employee of the British breeds were ultimately what sparked this entire process. For as long as I can recall, the industry has largely performance tested bulls with grain in a feed bunk, then hoped the numbers held true on grass.

Conversely, we performance test females on grass, then use creep feeders or feed bunks to help her out. Unfortunately, our "mistakes" disappear from the herd as open cows, and many of the columns on paper are a poor reflection of her true lifetime productivity...and profit.

At the very least, \$Fescue is the first 'coupon' available to Shorthorn breeders wanting to buy or sell genetics into toxic fescue environments. More importantly, it's the first index available to the commercial cowboys and cowgirls that endure the negative effects of the grass on an annual basis. There are no golden eggs in beef production, but more satisfied repeat customers is a good start. I would strongly encourage breeders to make the Fescue Tolerance Test a standard procedure when submitting DNA. Look for \$Fescue on the far right column of the indexes. Again, that box will remain empty until the individual's DNA fescue test has been completed. The individual T-Snip™ Score will be available under the DNA tab at the bottom of page in "Genetic Traits." I will be anxiously following demand for \$Fescue in upcoming sale catalogs. ☐



## Want more info on \$Fescue?

*Come and learn at the 2017 Annual Meeting Forum & Awards Banquet*

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2**

8:45 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

The Value of \$Indexes, Patrick Wall, Iowa State University Beef Specialist & Matt Woolfolk, ASA Director of Performance Programs

*To register & make hotel reservations, go to [shorthorn.org](http://shorthorn.org), under quick links and Annual Meeting Registration*