Evaluating the Growth Rate of Fescue at Different Cutting Heights

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Forage production is a vital industry in southeastern Ohio. Generally, mower conditioners are set at a height of 3 inches (short cut) when mowing grass hay. This study tests if setting mowers to a height of 5 inches (tall cut) will benefit forage recovery and quality, while not compromising production. This research project is located at the Jackson Agricultural Research Station (JARS), The Ohio State University, Jackson, OH. At JARS, the typical time between cuttings is 45-50 days. The research plots stretch 1,200 feet with two rows cut at 3 inches and two rows cut at 5 inches. Each set of two rows are raked together into one windrow and baled in accordance with the respective grass heights. In this study, weed population was also observed for differences in grass cut height. This study began in 2024 and will continue for a minimum of 3 years. This research faced a challenge with a historic drought hitting the region in 2024, with levels in Jackson County hitting D3 and D4 on the U.S. Drought Monitor with drought conditions lasting until November. 2024 results showed a longer recovery time between first and second cutting of 69 days. High weed pressure was observed in all plot rows. During the time between cuttings, the average gain of grass height was 2.19 inches in short cut and 2.15 inches in the tall cut. After the second cutting, the average weekly gain was 1 inch in short cut and 1.25 inches in tall cut. Bales were weighed by the two different cutting heights to obtain their official tonnage. Findings showed the tonnage difference favored the short cut with a difference of 202 pounds in first cutting and 192 pounds in second cutting.