



WEB CONTENT DISPLAY
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GRAZING CORN STALKS IN NO-TILL FIELDS

Grazing corn stalks is of major importance to area cow-calf producers, particularly this year. What people don't realize is that grazing can be compatible with no-till crop production. There is an on-going research study at Mead, Nebraska concerning grazing and crop yields.

In a corn-soybean rotation study conducted from 1996 to 2011, the effects on yields of the following crop were determined for fall-winter grazing (November to February) and spring grazing (February to mid-April). Spring grazing of stalks is the time of greatest concern of compaction by animal traffic on thawed and wet soil. The research field is irrigated. Three treatments (fall/winter grazed, spring grazed, and ungrazed) have been maintained in the same area since 1996. Stocking was with yearlings at 2.5 times the normal level since 2000.

Not grazed at all averaged or the check area yielded 60.4 bu/acre soybeans and 206 bu/acre corn. Fall grazed yielded more beans and corn (62.4 bu/ac and 209 bu/ac) and spring grazing even beat the check area by averaging 61.7 bu/ac and 207 bu/acre.

On average, yield of the following soybean crop was increased by about 2 bu/ac with fall-winter grazing and 1.3 bu/ac with spring grazing, compared with no grazing of corn stalks. Yield of corn as the second crop after grazing was also not significantly affected.

The results of this study and other studies conducted from 1993 to 1995 at the ARDC, and research currently being conducted near Brule, NE, will be reported in the 2013 Nebraska Beef Cattle Report. These additional studies, including a dryland trial, had no significant effect of grazing on mean grain yield for the following crop which was corn, soybean, or grain sorghum.

Grazing corn stalks is compatible with no-till management in eastern Nebraska and probably is for irrigated fields throughout the state with no loss in average grain yield expected. If this drought breaks and we have wet soil conditions in the spring, cattle owners need to consider removing cattle from the field or taking other management steps to minimize the effect of compaction.

If you are helping out a cattle producer this year with grazing stalks, there is a good checklist available to you to go over. It can be found at: beef.unl.edu/cattleproduction/rentingcropresidue

As far as value of the stalks, the critical calculation for the cattle owner is the total cost per head per day. The cattle producer will be comparing that number against the cost per head per day of other options. In a normal year, winter grazing costs much less than summer grazing but supplemental feed is commonly provided to the cattle.

For more information and estimating grazing days with stalks, a new calculator tool is available for cattle producers. I have used it several times this fall to help estimate costs and grazing days. Go to beef.unl.edu/learning/cornstalkgrazingcalc.shtml



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