



WEB CONTENT DISPLAY
July 16, 2010

PLANT TURNIPS FOR FALL GRAZING

With the added bonus of July moisture in wheat stubble this year, are you interested in a high quality pasture for late fall and winter grazing? Then plant turnips into wheat stubble. This is one way to get more grazing and allow fall pasture recovery. Turnips provide good grazing beginning in October and often lasts into the new year.

Turnips are cheap to plant since bulk seed can cost less than ten dollars per acre. And late July to early August is the time to plant turnips for fall grazing. Seedbed preparation and planting can be done several ways but do not plant turnip seeds too deep. If planting no-till, spray glyphosate to control weeds first. Good early weed control is essential. Turnips do poorly if weeds get ahead of them, but once started, turnips compete very well.

Plant only 2 to 4 pounds of turnip seed per acre. Turnip seed is very small, so barely cover it. If you drill your seed, just scratch the surface with your openers.

Animals grazing turnips in the fall and winter usually consume a diet that is 10% to 14% crude protein and 70% to 85% TDN, and fresh turnips are 80% to 90% moisture. So it is like having corn, alfalfa, and a river for cattle to graze. With that much water, they may not want to drink from a tank all that often, but you need to have water available. It may be important to have a palatable dry roughage available for cattle that are grazing turnips to slow passage of nutrients through the digestive tract. Also, provide a complete trace mineral salt supplement, making sure it contains iodine.

There can be a few issues with turnips in beef animals but these problems are rare and are reduced or eliminated with management. To begin, don't shift cattle onto turnips suddenly. Adjust them by feeding high quality hay or pasture for a couple of weeks before turnips to prepare their rumen for the high energy and protein in turnips. Giving them just a few hours access to turnips at the start also helps. Some producers will feed some dry roughage along with turnips. The roughage is usually low quality like corn stalks or lower quality grass hay. This also helps reduce loose stools, which is common with turnips.

Choking can occur, it's not very common, but it does happen. Producers who have experienced this problem with their cattle indicate they usually can remove the plug by forcing the turnip down the animal's throat. Not pleasant, but it works.

Turnips are an excellent feed resource for cattle and with the extra moisture this year an excellent consideration.

Randy Pryor, Extension Educator
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County
306 West 3rd Street, Wilber, NE 68465

Phone (402) 821-2151 • Fax (402) 821-3398 • e-mail: randy.pryor@unl.edu