
June 20, 2014

FORAGE FOLLOWING WHEAT

Wheat is an opportunity crop. Once it is harvested with the rain that we have received thus far, how do you plan to use that ground after harvest? With lots of growing season left this year and adequate moisture in June, there are many forage possibilities or double crop with soybeans or sunflowers.

For example, with good moisture, an early maturing corn is one possibility for silage if you plant it thick. A better dryland choice might be forage sorghum. Use high grain producing hybrids when available. Sunflowers can be a surprisingly good choice for a short-season silage or crop. They survive light frost and yield well under many conditions.

If you prefer hay instead of silage, plant sorghum-sudan hybrids, teff, or pearl or foxtail millet. A hay crop exceeding two tons per acre still can be grown if planted soon after harvest and rain is timely. Another hay or silage alternative is solid-seeded soybeans. A couple tons of good forage can be grown from taller, full season varieties planted after wheat. Oats planted in early August is another option. Yields over two tons are possible if moisture is good, fertility high, and a hard freeze comes a little late.

Definitely consider turnips, as well as oats, for fall pasture planted into wheat stubble in late July or early August. With a few timely rains in August and September, both oats and turnips produce much high quality feed in a short time. And, they are relatively inexpensive to plant. For fall and spring grazing cereal rye can be an excellent alternative. Don't automatically let your wheat ground sit idle the rest of the year, especially if you could use more forage. No-till technology has changed our thinking allowing additional opportunities with cropping and forage.

No-till planting of alfalfa, turnips, radishes, summer annual grasses, or other cover crops into wheat stubble has many advantages. Soil moisture is conserved, erosion is reduced, weed seeds remain buried, and tillage expenses are eliminated. But despite these advantages, some growers still experience spotty stands if residue is not being handled well by the seeding equipment. If that is your case, the best way to minimize this problem is to bale the straw and remove excess residue.

Control weeds prior to planting with herbicides like glyphosate. And be ready with post-emerge herbicides like Select or Poast Plus (when appropriate) for latter emerging weeds or volunteer wheat. Wheat stubble makes a good seedbed. Make it even better with a few management adjustments.

If volunteer wheat is left in the fall into September and October, this adds disease risk to any wheat planted near it. The disease is called wheat streak mosaic. A "brown out" period must exist for 10 to 14 days to eliminate that risk. I was called out on a field near Western this year that had that problem due to the neighbor's grazing in the fall and spring. A small mite that can blow in the wind spreads the virus. To fix this problem, it is probably easier to change one's own crop rotation, than ask the neighbor to kill the volunteer wheat and eliminate the grazing.

For more information, go to our "one stop" shop for cropping systems information on the Internet at cropwatch.unl.edu.

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