West-Central Forage Association

Triticale Swath Grazing Demonstration Project

Summary of activities and findings, 2009-12

This document provides a concise summary of the project's main findings. A more comprehensive report, and a wealth of associated data, are available at **westcentralforage.com.**

Cow-calf producers have long been challenged by the logistics and costs associated with winter feeding. Conventional winter feeding requires the producer to haul hay or silage to cattle, which places significant demands on an operation's labour and management. In terms of cost, by one estimate, conventional winter feeding costs $2.50 per animal per day when feed, storage, fuel, equipment and manure management costs are included.

In 2009, West-Central Forage Association (WCFA) established a four-year research program with producer-cooperators to test triticale swath grazing as a method of winter feeding. Since then, WCFA, producer-cooperators and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) advisors have observed and analyzed the practice in terms of crop production, nutrition, palatability, cost of feeding and overall value within a grazing system.

Crop production. Triticale is known as a crop that performs well even under dry conditions. The three producer-cooperators found growing triticale relatively straightforward, compared to other cereal crops, while seeing differences worth noting.

"I think a good thing about triticale," says Bob Kidd of Mayerthorpe, "is that it gives you a better window of staging. You're not just going to get two days of optimum conditions for swathing. You may get a week that's good. To me, triticale has a better swathing window than barley."

Nutrition. As part of the Triticale Swath Grazing Demonstration Project, feed samples were obtained at various points of the year, from each of the cooperating producers. The samples were laboratory-analyzed and the results were reviewed by ARD Beef and Forage Specialist Barry Yaremcio.

His assessment: "From the feed tests that we ran," says Yaremcio, "the quality was more than adequate for cows in mid- to late-pregnancy."

Palatability. Despite anecdotal concern about palatability going in, none of the three cooperating producers experienced significant issues.

"We did a side-by-side comparison of swath-grazing oats versus spring triticale as far as feeding our beef cows," says Onoway-area producer Chris Bowman. "The cows seemed to go for the oats quite well, but I thought they cleaned up the triticale as well as or better than the oats. To me, the triticale also has a higher nutrient value, so I think it tends to hold them a little bit better than oats."

Cost of feeding. What does it cost to feed an animal during the winter from swathed triticale. Compared to all-in conventional feeding cost of $2.50 per animal per day, triticale swath grazing appears to be considerably cheaper. Consider the results achieved by cooperating producer Kevin Porter of Stony Plain.

One year, Porter swath-grazed 210 cows – averaging 1,400-lb. and in their third trimester – on spring and winter triticale for 90 days. His total cost per animal per day, based on a 1,000-lb. Animal Unit Equivalency, was 93 cents.

> "In terms of swath grazing, that's about as good as it gets."

Value within a grazing system. The project evaluated various combinations of spring triticale, winter triticale and a mix of both. This spring-winter mixture was found to combine low production cost (both types are planted together in the fall) and high output (producing up to 18 months of grazing before being cut for silage).

In surveying the results of the Triticale Swath Grazing Demonstration Project, ARD Crop Development Specialist Bill Chapman sees plenty of evidence that the practice has value for cow-calf producers. He believes that, in a world where many producers have other management commitments, the reduced cost and management associated with triticale swath grazing will be welcome.

"You take a half-hour to move the fence around, you've fed your cows, you've checked on them and you're getting 200 grazing days per acre and feeding your cows for less than a buck a day," says Chapman. "In terms of swath grazing, that's about as good as it gets."

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For more information on the Triticale Swath Grazing Demonstration Project, visit **www.westcentralforage.com.**

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