ADVANCED AG SYSTEMS'S

Crop Soil News

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"It is the crops that feed the cows that make the milk which creates the money."

Advanced Ag Systems

Research, Education, Consulting

Earliest Harvested Forage

For many, this was the year they would like to forget. Every time you turned around, the weather was against you. But you still need forage for the animals. This month, we turn to the earliest quality forage you can make.

Leaves are barely on the trees and Carl is harvesting 3.5 to 4.5 tons of winter triticale with digestibility higher than top alfalfa and crude protein running 15 to 20%. He follows this with a slightly shorter season zone till corn silage. The total yield of the two crops is 35% higher per acre than growing a full season corn crop.

Our winter triticale forage research and development started 30 years ago when it was a mediocre after-thought forage of 1.5 – 2.0 tons of dry matter. Since then, our research has produced a forage of higher digestibility than early, first-cut alfalfa. This can mean **9.5 lbs. more milk from the same dry matter.** Farmers report that the high digestibility eliminates the "summer slump" in hot weather. Yields in one early cut are greater than 4-5 cuts of alfalfa (**3.5 to 6.5 tons DM/A)**, but at a fraction of the cost. The cows dive into it and can really produce from the high digestibility, sugar content, and potential protein. Grown in rotation with a slightly shorter season silage corn, the **total yield/acre** for the year is directly **increased by 35%** (corn silage plus triticale silage from the same acre). This is why it has evolved from a minor crop to a **key component of rotation on thousands of acres** in the US, Canada, Ireland, Germany, Hungary, and other countries.

All of this and the **most effective soil protectant** developed as its winter forage blanket protects from soil erosion. The maximized fall forage (critical for high spring yields) absorbs a huge amount of nutrients that normally would be lost to the streams, where it would pollute. Our research has measured up to 160 lbs. of nitrogen stored in the plant before winter (normally 70 – 100 lbs. of nitrogen). The importance and benefit of this crop was summed up by a farmer who said, "I used to be a corn grower that grew winter forage; now I am a winter forage grower who grows corn."

It is not a perfect crop. Last year, the horrible winter with rotations of warm (broke dormancy) and bitter cold, physiologically hammered yields and produced some serious yield-robbing plant diseases, the worst growing conditions for the crop in all my years of research with winter triticale forage. We have had horrible corn yield years, but we still grow it. The same with winter forage. There are key steps that you can take to protect the crop at a very low cost and minimize the yield loss we experienced.

We prefer triticale over rye as it stands much better and allow harvest almost as early. There are now varieties that mature almost as early as rye but supply higher forage quality and better standability. Any time we pushed nitrogen to rye it went flat on the ground. We have harvested flag leaf triticale that had 150 to 200 lbs. of nitrogen that was all standing at harvest. Most rye is a bin run product of dubious germination. There are numerous certified winter forage triticale available to meet your farms needs.

The first step is to get good seed. In earlier newsletters, we showed pictures of an excellent stand next to a horrible one. The difference was **certified seed vs bin run (or brown bag junk) seed**. You wouldn't plant bin run corn from your neighbor, why do it with a more valuable crop like winter triticale forage? Certified seed is carefully handled to maximize germination and carefully scouted to ensure disease-free. **You only need 100 lbs. of seed/acre**. Replicated, multi-year research found **NO advantage to planting more** – put that extra money into a **seed treatment** before planting.

Certified seed from selected varieties can go a long way of eliminating devastation from snow mold. Selecting top varieties, not some questionable bin run in a brown bag, is the first step to high yield

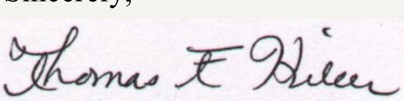
A major key that farmers and seed suppliers need to step up to is the use of seed treatments as a critical practice for high yields. In our replicated trials planted on time, the **seed treatment yielded 15% more**; the lower-yielding late-planted stands the treated yielded 28% more than the untreated. Barley yellow dwarf and other diseases will hold back yields. Seed treatments with neonic will help hold off the aphids that bring barley yellow dwarf. **There are some seed treatments**, such as those containing Adepidyn ® are **labeled for snow mold,** which can kill stands. We have also used sulfur fertilizer applied to the vegetation for snow mold control. This will be discussed in a future newsletter. If you are hyperventilating from the slight increase in cost for seed treatment, you can drop your seeding rate from 100 lbs./A to 92 lbs./a and have the same crop if planted on time with the same total cost. At a 15% yield increase, I would buy treated seed and plant at normal rates to maximize return on my investment.

THE NUMBER ONE FACTOR FOR HIGH YIELD IS THE DATE YOU PUT THE SEED IN THE GROUND. This has had a **huge impact on increasing our yields** in replicated trials. For upper NY and across that region on either side of the Canadian border, it needs to be in the ground by the 10th of September. Every bit later reduces yields significantly. For lower Pennsylvania and across Ohio and the lower Midwest, before the 20th of September is best. For further south, such as Tennessee, the **first of October** is your "in the ground" target. When we moved our planting date up two weeks before the wheat date, the forage yields increased massively. You are growing winter forage, not a cover crop. **Planting date is a key management step.**

Fall nitrogen is critical for developing the plant for high spring yields

The second step to high yield is to **feed the crop** when you plant. In New York, replicated research the spring yield at all spring nitrogen levels increased through 60 lbs. of N/A (plus sulfur) of fall starter. Preliminary work in Tennessee indicates that the critical fall number is 100 lbs. of N/A at planting. Do NOT wait to spread manure as the nitrogen source before you plant. My research and that at Penn State agree that the yield loss is greater than the small nitrogen savings.

Sincerely,



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