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Summer Grazing a Swath Grazing Crop 2006

Project #: 2006-A

Cooperator: Jim Anderson, Rimbey, Alberta

Sponsor: Grey Wooded Forage Association

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Back in the spring of 2006, Jim Anderson called to discuss the possibility of doing a demo project. He wanted to show whether an early seeded cereal crop that is grazed before the boot stage and swath-grazed in winter yield more or less than a late seeded cereal crop that is only swath-grazed in winter. Jim had about 22 acres of sod that had been killed with glyphosate in fall, 2005 that he was willing to use for this project. Soil samples were taken in tests on May 10th and sent to Norwest Labs in Edmonton. The soil test report provided the recommended fertilizer rates for this project site.



The whole 22 acres received a glyphosate treatment prior to seeding and the 2nd paddock received another glyphosate treatment prior to seeding. Jim split the field into two paddocks and seeded one of them on May 14th. The first paddock was fertilized at the recommended rates at the time of seeding. Jim fertilized and seeded the second paddock on June 18th 2006. Barley and Fall Rye were seeded at one bushel per acre each in both paddocks. Yield clips were taken on the early seeded paddock on June 30th. The forage growth looked somewhat thin and patchy when we did the clips. Dandelions and other weeds were prevalent in the thin patches. We estimated that there was about 1,556lbs/acre of forage available at that time. This yield did not include any broadleaf plants, however, they added another 1,100 lbs/acre to the yield.

The paddock was then grazed by the Anderson's cow herd immediately after that. The timing of this grazing was excellent with about 6 to 8 inches of forage growth available. We wanted to make sure we start grazing the first paddock early enough so we can finish grazing before the cereal crop reaches boot stage and we succeeded at that. On September 4th, Jim and Jackie took yield clips on both paddocks immediately prior to swathing the whole field.

The early seeded paddock yielded 6,552 lbs/acre and the late seeded paddock yielded 7,739 lbs/acre at that time. The total yield, 1,556 lbs/acre on June 30th + 6,552 prior to swathing equaled 8,108 lbs/acre for the early seeded and grazed paddock. We also sent samples from each paddock to Parkland Labs in Red Deer.

Feed tests done on clips from both paddocks showed interesting results. The early seeded paddock tested at 18.3% protein and TDN at 65.5 on a dry matter basis. The late seeded paddock tested at 10.4% protein and TDN at 64.7 on a dry matter basis. It was noted that the Fall Rye was the major component of the early seeded sample, explaining the difference in protein levels.

I think the results from this demonstration project, while only being the results of one growing season, show that it is possible to get equal or more production with an early seeded, summer grazed swath-grazing crop than a late seeded swath-grazing crop. In this case Barley was used with Fall Rye. If it had not been for the Fall Rye in the early seeded paddock, the results may have not been so good. Oats might well be a better choice for this system. I think we've learned enough from this project to look into this system more in the future. John Reid, another long-time GWFA member showed me something he did that could be a good project design for this concept. He had grazed portions of his oats crop for swath-grazing not only once, but two and three times.

