

Annual grains open fall and spring beef grazing window

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By Ed Haag

Northwest research data proves summer planted oat and triticale forage combo cuts production costs and adds critical time to the fall and spring grazing seasons.

Thanks to a combination of spring forage oats and winter triticale planted in August, Northwest ranchers, with irrigated ground, are a whole lot closer to that holy grail of beef production: year-round grazing.

Avoiding the need to cut, bale and transport hay can mean \$14 per ton less (2008 USDA estimate) in forage production costs.

“There is no reason that in mild years, a beef producer can’t graze his cattle through the winter with this system,” Kurt Braunwart, Crop Scientist and CEO of ProGene Plant Research Othello, said.

ProGene researchers have been conducting field trials on the oat and triticale mixes to determine which varieties perform best together.

These studies also assessed how effective the two-grain system is in extending the grazing season.

Braunwart said even in tough winters like last year, producers can graze as many as two weeks earlier in the fall with the oat and triticale combination.

Jeff Schmidt, operator of JR ranch, of Othello, used the system last year to graze his cattle through November.

Braunwart said when the two-grain mix is planted in August, the spring oats grow rapidly and are available for grazing in October.

The winter triticale, on the other hand, is less aggressive in its early development stage and remains in the under story throughout the fall.

“Oats are, by far, the dominant species in the fall grazing scenario,” Braunwart said, adding in the spring, the triticale becomes the dominant species producing up to two inches of leaf mass per day in late boot.

For Braunwart, this is the beauty of the two-grain production system.

“Just as one forage has run its course, the second one kicks in,” he said. “Oats in the fall and triticale in the spring: two crops for the cost of a single seeding.”

Estimates generated from ProGene research data show 14 acres of the blend can accomplish the same production goals as 10 acres of each grain seeded separately.

For more information on growing oats and triticale for grazing, contact ProGene Plant Research at (509) 488-3977 or kurt@progenell.com.