

THE PROGRESSIVE DAIRYMAN

Vol. 17 No. 9

Serving Western Dairies

NORTHWEST EDITION

September 2003

Winter triticale becoming preferred quality silage

by Roberta Chlarson

Washington dairy farmers are recognized within the industry as among the most efficient and technologically advanced in the United States. Even though milk production continues to grow, the number of dairy farms in Washington has dropped 54 percent since 1981.



Dairymen at summer forage field day.

In the face of increased pressure to meet manure nutrient management demands, maintain herd health, and milk quality, Washington dairymen and others across the Northwest are not only meeting these demands, but also reducing feed costs. One avenue to accomplish this reduction is by incorporating triticale silage into their feed program.

Triticale ("trit-ih-KAY-lee") is a crop species resulting from a cross between wheat and rye. "We've been developing numerous varieties of forage triticale for years," said Kurt Braunwart, owner of ProGene Plant Research. ProGene does research and development work with a triticale breeder, Resource Seeds out of Gilroy, California, and a network of producers, dealers, cooperative extension, and conservation districts. "We have several varieties that are working very well in the Pacific Northwest, from which farmers and dairymen can select the right triticale for the right purpose. We have been doing our homework and testing these varieties with the dairies to make sure they are meeting the needs."

Triticale is grown as a double crop, which makes it a cost-effective source of for-

age, and a primary source of the digestible fiber needed for animal health and productivity.

The key to best tonnage and quality is to manage it as a primary crop. Many growers go as far as tissue testing to know when and how much fertilizer and manure to add. By matching the feed attributes of triticale with the nutrient needs of dairy animals, dairy managers can increase efficiency and productivity of their business. Triticale has been successfully fed to lactating cows, dry cows, and replacement heifers. In each case, farmers might select a different variety for harvest at a different maturity to match their needs.

Triticale is winter-hardy and less vulnerable to drought than other feed crops. It is efficient with use of soil moisture, and is responsive to excess nitrogen. Triticale is very flexible in crop rotation, and is known for improving herd health.

Kelly Callahan works with his family on a farm/dairy operation in Royal City, Washington. The Callahans have used triticale since starting their dairy. "It's predictable, when we run out of triticale, we have more herd health problems," said Callahan.

"Some producers go after higher protein, but shorten their tonnage," said Callahan. "I'm not after 'extreme milk'. I'm happy with 14 percent forage protein, and then pull off 25 ton or more of triticale."

The Callahans have been involved in various family-owned businesses, including farming, for many years, and in dairy for more than four years. "What works for us may not work for someone else. We've had our trials, but I think the key is being a good farmer first." Callahans have 950 head of dairy stock, and grow nearly 4,000 acres of crops, 450 in triticale. "We've gotten really efficient with our equipment, and can swath, chop, get the triticale out, and have corn planted with a 24-hour turnaround after harvest. That gives our corn a full 124-day growth period." The Callahans have also been recognized for their cooperation

A&J Farms - Othello, Washington Winter Forage Replicated Yield Trials			
Mid Boot Wet Matter Yield		Late Boot Dry Matter Yield	
Name	% of Trical 102	Name	% of Trical 102
Trical 102 Awnless	115%	Trical 102	100%
Trical 815	105%	Trical 102 Awnless	96%
Trical 102	100%	Trical 336	92%
Trical 336	98%	Trical 815	81%
Bobcat	68%	Bobcat	65%

with the conservation district on their manure nutrient management plan. "I think if you make it simple, it will work well. You just have to pay attention to details."

Triticale's profitability comes from being a winter double crop with silage corn, late planted sweet corn, dry beans, or other warm-season crops. ProGene and their network of partners have been comparing varieties in replicated yield trials since the early 1990's. Listed below are the commercial varieties from the 2003 trial data at Othello, Washington. Each variety is listed as a percent of TRICAL 102, the longest established variety on the list. "Different varieties fit different farm needs and different regions," said Braunwart. "It is important to understand those differences through research and interacting with producers, which is what makes the local network so valuable."

"Farming is hard enough," said David Beach of Connell Grain Growers. "Every day, every acre has to count." Connell Grain Growers has been working with researchers like Braunwart to produce a high quality seed that meets the needs of dairymen. "There's a real need for the seed development we are doing," said Beach. "A crop like triticale actually makes producers money as well as meeting the regulatory manure nutrient management requirements. I think we've really got something here — it helps the economy and takes care of the land, and that's everybody's aim." ■

—Reprinted by permission; originally appeared in September 2003, pp. 14-15.