

# Hay and Forage Grower

## Seed Once, Graze Twice

This pasture mixture slashes costs, expands grazing window

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With today's high input costs, beef producer Jeff Schmidt wants to get as much bang as possible from every production buck. That's why he seeds a blend of winter triticale and spring oats in mid-August and gets both fall and early spring grazing.

Schmidt, operator of JR ranch, Othello, WA, says cattle that would normally get baled hay from October through November and then in March and early April now have access to grazing.

“The less hay I have to cut and bale, the more money there is in my pocket,” says Schmidt. “It's just basic economics.”

He says the oats in the irrigated mix emerge quickly and are available for intensive grazing in October, while the triticale sprouts but remains in the understory until winter sets in. A severe winter kills most of the oats, while the triticale goes dormant but remains viable. When conditions are normal in Schmidt's region, the triticale breaks dormancy at the end of February.

“In milder years, when there is less winterkill in the oats and a shorter or no dormancy period in the triticale, this opens the door to year-round grazing,” he says.

Besides the financial advantage of extending his grazing season, Schmidt notes that seeding simultaneously for fall and spring grazing is more efficient than seeding the two grains separately. Based on research by Schmidt's seed supplier, ProGene Plant Research, Othello, it's estimated that 14 acres of the blend can accomplish the same goals as 10 acres of each grain seeded separately.

Planting spring oats in August for fall grazing is a fairly common practice throughout the Northwest and Midwest. Ohio State University Extension researchers report that, in a growing environment where perennial hay averages less than 3 tons/acre/year, spring oats on a summer re-crop after winter wheat will equal if not beat that figure.

The use of winter triticale for early spring grazing is also an established practice. Beef producers in the Northwest, who have access to late spring and summer grazing leases, are often in need of forage in late winter and early spring to carry their cows through spring calving. For these cow-calf operators, triticale, with its remarkable early season growth rate of up to 2” of leaf mass per day, is the annual forage of choice.

While Schmidt has used oats and triticale separately, it has only been recently that he has tried them together.

“I am sold on the concept,” he says. “It offers me the kind of flexibility I need to run a profitable cattle operation in today's production environment.”

Variety selection is a key to making the crop combination work, points out Mike Wood, ProGene research agronomist.

“Deciding which oats and triticales work together isn't as simple as it might look,” he says. “You can take two varieties that perform very well individually, but in a mix they clash.”

For example, Wood says Schmidt needed a very aggressive oat variety that can be grazed as early as possible in fall, and a slower-to-establish triticale that shows only moderate fall growth but shines in late winter after it breaks dormancy.

For more on growing oats and triticale together, call ProGene at 509-488-3977 or email [kurt@progenellc.com](mailto:kurt@progenellc.com).