

BCRC BEEF SCIENCE CLUSTER

Research Facts

IN PROGRESS

Reducing Swath Grazing Costs FRG.03.09

Project Title: Reducing the Cost of Swath Grazing Cows by Increasing the Swathed-Crop Yield

Researchers: Dr. Vern S. Baron, AAFC Lacombe, Dr. John A. Basarab, ARD Lacombe, Dr. Don Salmon, ARD Lacombe, Ms. Kristin Hacault, Pioneer Hi-Bred Ltd., Mr. Albert Kuipers, Grey Wooded Forage Association, Dr. Shannon Scott, AAFC Brandon and Dr. Byron Irvine, AAFC Brandon

Background: Swath and stockpiled grazing methods have considerable economic benefits over traditional winter feeding systems. No research has been conducted on increasing yield of the swathed crop, even though it represents 75 per cent of the daily feeding cost per cow. Preliminary research indicates that new varieties of spring triticale (e.g. Bunker and Tyndal) maintain high forage yield with late planting and may result in swath-grazed carrying capacities that are at least 40% greater than barley. However, producer experiences with triticale have been mixed and animal acceptability must be tested in controlled swath grazing experiments. Corn utilizes the full growing season, and has been winter-grazed, but little information is available on grazing losses or economic efficiency.

Objective: To reduce daily winter feeding cost of cows by identifying crop specific seeding dates that increase the yield and carrying capacity of swathed pastures

These researchers will optimize species planting date-yield relationships for barley, oat and triticale planted weekly between mid-May and mid-June in Brandon and Lacombe. These small grains will be planted alone or in mixtures with field pea and winter triticale. Forage yield and quality will be compared at the soft dough stage. Cost-efficient crop combinations will be identified.

The economic efficiency of swath-grazed triticale and corn will also be evaluated in a winter grazing trial comparing corn, triticale and a drylot control over two years. Cow weight change, body condition, carrying capacity, waste and nutritive value will be determined, and winter weathering losses will be monitored.

Implications: This research will provide new agronomic recommendations that improve economic efficiency by increasing carrying capacity, yield and yield stability of swath grazed crops, and determine the feasibility of winter swath grazing using spring triticale and corn.

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