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Idaho

East Idaho grower tests new winter clover seed

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

AMERICAN FALLS, Idaho — A local farmer is testing a new species of clover, bred to enhance pasture land, as a unique cover crop option for his region capable of fixing nitrogen throughout winter while mellowing compacted soil.

Pleasant Valley grower Rob Giesbrecht directly seeded FIXatioN Balansa clover into 150 acres of wheat stubble on Aug. 12, spreading it with fertilizer applied to support residue decomposition and following with a roller.

Cover crops are planted solely for soil health benefits, such as building organic matter, preventing erosion, breaking up soil compaction, nitrogen fixation and biofumigation. In southeast Idaho, where many plant species aren't adapted for the harsh winters, growers typically plant cover crops immediately following harvest and incorporate them into their soil in late October.

FIXatioN clover, however, tolerates extreme cold, produces a deep taproot and has fixed up to 120 pounds of nitrogen per acre in trials. Given its cold hardiness, Giesbrecht expects the clover will continue fixing nitrogen throughout the winter, maintaining roots in the soil to prevent erosion until he discs it into his soil during spring. The deep roots should also provide conduits for soil-moisture penetration.

Some area growers have



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Southeast Idaho grower Rob Giesbrecht walks through his field where a new clover variety is being seeded directly into wheat stubble. He's testing the clover as a winter cover crop option with a deep tap root and high nitrogen fixation potential.

tried Austrian peas as a winter cover crop to fix nitrogen, but Giesbrecht notes peas lack clover's deep taproot.

"I don't know another cover crop that has deep taproots like that and will create nitrogen like that in the time I have," Giesbrecht said.

Giesbrecht intends to continue planting oilseed radish and mustard after harvest, working them into his soil in late October, for the biofumigation benefits, adding the clover provides one more tool for his farm.

"The seed is going to cost me around \$20 per acre," Giesbrecht said. "If it does what it says, it will save me \$55 per acre in nitrogen, and I'll also be

ahead on organic matter."

Giesbrecht has sold some of the seed to ranchers in several states as a dealer for Grassland Oregon, which released FIXatioN clover two years ago.

Don Baune, a partner with Salem-based Grassland Oregon, said the variety has won over farmers as a winter cover crop in the Midwest and can survive in temperatures as low as minus 10 degrees. He said it fixes about double the nitrogen per acre as crimson clover, one of the most popular nitrogen-fixing clover varieties, and also works well as a dairy silage crop.

Baune said FIXatioN clover was developed through conven-

tional breeding, derived from a few clover plants in research plots that somehow survived an especially cold Oregon winter.

Baune envisions it will also prove to be an important nitrogen source for organic producers.

Doug Ruff, another Pleasant Valley grower, has never planted a winter cover crop and will be interested in Giesbrecht's results. Ruff has experimented with clover and oilseed radish cover crop blends, discing them into his soil in October.

"We've got such low organic matter. (Cover crops) really help build the soil back up," Ruff said. "I know the more you can keep your ground active, the better it is."



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Idaho Bean Commission Chairman Don Tolmie talks with University of Idaho soil fertility specialist Amber Moore during a University of Idaho field day focused on bean research in Kimberly on Aug. 12.

Bean researchers study nitrogen fertilizer options

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

KIMBERLY, Idaho — About 50 people turned out to walk through bean fields Wednesday to find out more about University of Idaho research focused on dry beans.

One of the trials is homing in on bean response to different application rates, methods of application and types of nitrogen fertilizer.

Bean growers were looking for an effective slow-release product, and Idaho Bean Commission approached UI researchers to test new products, said Amber Moore, a UI soil fertility specialist.

Bean growers typically put down nitrogen at pre-plant and top dress the crop later. Growers want to be able to do it all at pre-plant and avoid having to

There was no noticeable response in last year's trials at Kimberly, although the control plot with no nitrogen applied had the second lowest yields, she said.

Beans don't need much nitrogen, but they do benefit from a little shock of it, she said.

This year, the researchers made improvements to the experiment with an increased number of replications, six-row plots instead of four-row plots, longer plots, fewer treatments and better-timed petiole sampling.

In addition to the control treatment of no nitrogen, other treatments included urea at pre-plant, ESN at pre-plant, half urea and half ESN at pre-plant, and urea at pre-plant and top-dressed at second trifoliolate.

Each treatment was done at three different rates — 33 percent, 66 percent and 100 percent of UI recommendations. Pink #527 beans were used this year and were planted on June 16. Petiole sampling was done on Aug. 4, and data is still being processed.

Yields will be the ultimate test of the benefits of the ESN fertilizer, but what matters is the cost-effectiveness of any treatment, Moore said.

Don Tolmie, chairman of the Idaho Bean Commission, said bean growers are funding several start-up research projects and reaping the rewards of additional funding from such agencies as USDA and ISDA.

"We've funded more research in the last three to five years than the last 20 years, probably even 30 (years)," he said.

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— Don Tolmie

Chairman,
Idaho Bean Commission

UI cereals educator learning regional grain challenges

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

REXBURG, Idaho — Jon Hogge has spent the summer studying grain fields and attending agricultural meetings throughout the state, meeting cereal growers and learning about their concerns.

As the new University of Idaho Extension cereals educator for Eastern Idaho, Hogge will be the first to respond when farmers in the critical grain-growing region need help assessing diseases and other crop problems.

"I think there are some unprecedented insect and disease issues we're not used to having," Hogge said. "We're going to have to work pretty hard to stay ahead of the game."

When he encounters especially complex issues, he'll consult with a host of other UI crop experts, including UI Extension cereals pathologist Juliet Marshall. Marshall hopes Hogge's position will free her to focus more time on research,



Jon Hogge, the new University of Idaho Extension area cereals educator for Eastern Idaho, attends a field day on direct seeding hosted July 22 in Swan Valley, Idaho. Hogge will be tasked with helping growers diagnose problems in their cereal crops.

John O'Connell/Capital Press

and less on field visits.

"It should lighten my load up quite a bit when it comes to a lot of the initial calls of problems in the field," Marshall said. "I'm inundating him with a lot of our material and taking him on a lot of my initial field visits so he can get experience with problem fields."

Marshall said it's been a good season to expose Hogge to an array of crop issues that have surfaced, including barley yellow dwarf virus, application errors, seeding depth issues, stripe rust, cereal cyst nematode and iron toxicity.

Prior to accepting his

new position June 22, Hogge worked as a UI Extension forage educator for Jefferson and Clark counties. He now serves growers in Jefferson, Clark, Bonneville, Fremont, Madison and Teton counties.

Hogge's office is in Madison County. Wayne Jones, UI's interim eastern district Extension director, said the university won't fill the Madison County Extension educator's position, which has been vacant for four years, to fund Hogge's position.

Jones said UI has a similar cereals position serving Northern Idaho, and faculty determined a couple of years

ago that a cereals educator was needed in Eastern Idaho, a major wheat-growing area and home to about 80 percent of the state's malt barley production.

"This fills a need we've had for quite a while at the university, and we're looking forward to some good things coming out of the position," Jones said. Jones is still working to fill five open Extension educator positions in Eastern Idaho.

Hogge, who started his UI forage position in 2011, has a bachelor's degree from Utah State University and earned a master's in agricultural education from University of Idaho in 2008. He also spent 11 years working as a high school agriculture teacher in Rigby and Idaho Falls.

Nearly midway through this season's harvest, Hogge said growers are generally pleased with yields and are finishing well ahead of schedule, which should leave them ample time to plant fall cover crops or irrigate volunteer grain post harvest for cattle forage.

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Worm test plot in St. John, Washington

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