

Rangeland seeding increases production



Rangeland seeding is currently being done in Morrow County on burned areas and abandoned cropland with a rangeland drill on loan from the Forest Service. Sites are being selected where a less than adequate cover of perennial bunchgrass exists and annuals make up most of the ground cover. The Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District is charging a \$2 per acre rental fee for the drill.

A management plan is developed in cooperation with the land owner for implementing sound management practices for the unit that is to be seeded. Proper rest following seeding allowing the grass stand to become established, proper turn in time on the seeding and proper grazing heights are the primary items of the management plan.

Several adapted grasses are available for seeding. Some of the new grasses are Secar bluebunch wheatgrass, Russian wild rye and a drought resistant orchard grass named piute, which can grow down to ten inches of annual rainfall. Also available are Sherman big bluegrass, intermediate wheatgrass, Siberian wheatgrass, crested wheatgrass and pubescent wheatgrass.

Russian wild rye is an excellent forage for sheep and cattle. With the new cultivar, "Swift" the seedling vigor has been improved. Protein content of the leaves throughout the grazing

season is unsurpassed by any other grass and is taken ahead of any other grass from spring through fall.

A new hybrid grass still in the experimental stage, is a cross between quackgrass and bluebunch wheatgrass, a common perennial bunchgrass in Morrow County, which appears to have excellent potential.

"Secar" bluebunch wheatgrass is available on the market and is an improved variety of one of the bunchgrasses that grows commonly in Morrow County. This improved variety does not have the awn (needle) on the top of the seed which discourages cattle from grazing during the growth stage when the grass is producing seed.

Seventy five percent cost share is available from A.S.C.S. for grass seeding.

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'Wheat stubble grazing' may not be an advantage

Livestock growers have traditionally put cattle on wheat stubble in the fall after moving cattle down from summer forest allotments for short and long periods of time, sometimes extending through the winter. Due to present economic conditions and a mild winter up to this point

stubble grazing seems to be the answer for cheap winter feed. But, livestock growers want to be careful when balancing winter feed bills with proper nutrition for their breeding herd especially in the last three months of pregnancy.

The affects of winter feeding on cows in their last three months of pregnancy, and also after calving has a profound affect on subsequent reproductive performance. Inadequate nutrition reduces the percentage of cows coming into heat and conceiving early in the breeding season resulting in lower weaning weights later on.

Cows should be fed so they gain about 100 pounds during the last three to four months of pregnancy. This essentially means that they neither gain nor lose weight, but use the nutrients for growth of the developing calf. The increase in body weight is accounted for by the weight of the calf, placental membranes and fluids. After calving, these cows will weigh about the same as they did three to four months before calving.

Digestibility of straw and chaff tends to be very low. Protein in these forages averages only 2.4 percent. This is below beef cattle requirements and needs supplementing. Even a dry, pregnant, mature cow cannot eat enough of these feeds to meet the daily

requirements. Total digestible nutrients and specifically digestible protein, are usually limited in rations composed largely of cereal residues. Also, because of the low energy value of straw and chaff, it is better to supplement with a complete protein, such as alfalfa, soybean meal, or cottonseed meal along with supplements for energy, calcium, phosphorus and trace minerals for best results.

From a conservation viewpoint stubble grazing to a certain extent diminishes protection against erosion. A minimum of 1,000 pounds of residue is necessary on slopes up to eight percent, and more residue is needed on steeper slopes to reduce runoff and hold soil in place. Standing stubble conserves the maximum amount of soil moisture during summer fallow. Standing stubble

deflects winds above the soil surface while the land is fallow and helps to trap the snow in winter. Erect stubble also provides shade during summer and cools the soil surface, conserving moisture. The influence of grazing knocks down stubble exposing the soil surface to wind and runoff. Grazing also reduces the amount of residue on the soil surface. Compaction caused by grazing animals' hoof action is compounded by wet soil conditions.

A question of priorities arises when considering whether to graze or not to graze grain stubble. If a manager wishes to maximize production from both his cropland and livestock operations it would be to his advantage to manage for the highest production of both wheat and livestock without detracting from either one which would mean not grazing grain stubble.



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