

“Why not put the crops and livestock together?”



-by John Snider, Agronomist

Profitability in Grazing

When you are west of the 100th Meridian water is neither prevalent nor convenient, until you get to the ocean. The tallgrass prairie dwindles to bunch grasses, then steppe, and then high desert. Even as you cross the divide that puts you closer to the Pacific Ocean, you can still be haunted by drought.

90 million acres of grassland are in this sequence of biomes. Previously, these lands fed herds of buffalo, elk, and antelope; now they are the base of cattle and sheep. Crops grown on these lands are irrigated for feeding these same livestock. Feedlots have tried to situate themselves where these two systems best meet. We perfected a “dis-integrated” system for supplying our protein. Put the crops over here; the livestock go over there.

Some have discovered a simple more efficient process for our benefit: Why not put the crops and stock back together?

Throughout, hay, grains and cattle are shipped out for export to other regions or across the Pacific. A new thinking is keeping these exports at home longer. Grazing crops for summer and winter are required. A high plane of nutrition and subsequent performance depends on crops which are easily harvested and nutrient dense.

In the past, cut and carry scenarios of a grazing crop or pastured system was “ad lib”; you took what you got and made up for it in compensatory gain in the feedlot. The trouble was that your loss was another’s gain. Now, with planned grazing and plant material bred for palatability and regrowth, you get the gains while also improving your soils. Once again it is a self-sustained system.

The grazing of ruminants is a most efficient link to the Sun. Photosynthetic energy from green growing plants lowers the cost of gain and increases profit per

acre. In this context “re-integration” of agriculture becomes agro-ecology.

In crop lands across the West, nutrient, water and carbon cycles have been bypassed while “nutrient management” in feedlots means waste disposal. Bringing it all back together can mean lower feeding costs in winter and extended quality grazing in summer.

Emerson Dell Farm in the Columbia Basin has made summer finished beef a part of its direct market plan. David Brewer and his wife Margaret are the fifth generation of the family to oversee the farm. They use no-till technology and crop rotations to produce wheat, canola, barley and mustard. Grass and cattle are raised on the rest of the farm using rotational grazing.



Summer grazing in the Columbia Basin

Brewer needed a crop for summer that also provided the energy intake for high nutrition. In the past, summer crops such as C4 grass, was all that was available. Now with a sorghum-sudan hybrid (SxS) and multiple grazed brassicas, he can achieve 2lb

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gain/day on his finishers. All it takes is 1-3 lbs of brassica seed to extend the quality and grazing period of a summer crop within an 11-15 inch annual rainfall region.

Brewer is using two PGG Seeds brassica varieties: WINFRED, a kale/turnip cross, and GRAZA, a fodder radish. Both are anchored by a taproot providing nutrient capture and drought adaptation. He drilled his BMR SxS to no ill effect. Animal performance, capitalization of regrowth and the amount of residue left as cover are all linked to profitability in grazing.



Immediate manure decomposition

The cost to grow this crop can be as little as \$0.02/lb. The cost of gain per day can be \$0.40/lb. In a feedlot, cost of gain can be as high as \$1.00/lb on grain rotations. If you are in the livestock and crop business, you might want to keep both on the farm longer and graze the crops.

Winfred Brassica



Winfred is the most versatile of brassicas, being suitable for a wide range of soil fertility and environmental conditions, stock classes and sowing times. Winfred is early maturing at 10-12 weeks and has the ability to be grazed up to three times through summer and early fall.

Graza Radish



Graza is a cost effective cultivar to grow, is easy to sow and quick to germinate. During summer when weight gains are difficult, Graza offers a palatable solution to the effects of cool season pastures. A major advantage of Graza is its persistence, resulting in more grazing cycles.

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