

From the Ohio State University Fairfield County Beef Newsletter
<http://fairfield.osu.edu/ag/beef/beefdec4.html>

Why Would Anyone Want to Plant Oats in August?!?! - Curt Stivison, Engineering Technician, Fairfield SWCD; Bob Hendershot, Grasslands Management Specialist, NRCS; Stan Smith, PA, OSU Extension

At first glance, the answer seems like a simple, “You wouldn’t!” After all, grandpa always said you mud oats in March, and you sow wheat in October dust. However, if you’re currently feeding hay or other harvested and stored feeds to your cows, you may want to read on and explore this question further.

It’s difficult to imagine until you’ve seen first hand what oats planted in August look like. As part of a recent Fairfield/Licking County Advanced Grazing and Conservation School, participants visited the accompanying photographed field of oats being strip grazed. These photos were taken on Saturday, November 30, 2002 of oats that were planted on August 5, 2002 into a previously harvested wheat field.

From the photos you may be able to note that the average height of the oats is 36 inches or better, and at the time the oats have been slowly heading out for approximately 3 weeks. In fact, measurements taken on the standing forage indicate there is an average of 5 tons (yes, 10,000 pounds) of dry matter per acre on this 30 acre field. Even more impressively, we’ve discovered through manure sample analysis that the bred cows grazing this field were realizing 18% protein from the oats yet in late November. The digestible nutrients were also as high as very good spring pasture. In fact fed alone, the oats are too good a feed for mature cows in mid-gestation! When available, corn stalks or other lower quality forages could be offered cows in mid gestation in order to more efficiently utilize the nutrition in these oats.

The Wolfinger family of Lancaster manage this farm. They no-till drilled two bushels of bin run oats into this field on August 5. Immediately ahead of the grain drill they spread 100 pounds of urea as a source of nitrogen. On November 8, they began to strip graze 44 bred cows and one mature bull on the field. At the time, the group was being offered approximately 8 foot by 950 foot strips of the oats once a day, plus poor quality hay in a round bale feeder. These strips yield the equivalent of approximately 40 pounds of dry matter per head per day, of which they have been consuming all but about 6 inches of the stubble. At the same time they are also consuming less than a large round bale per week in addition to the oats. At that rate of utilization, this 30 acre field of oats will maintain these 45 cattle for over 4 months!

Total cost of production for seed, fertilizer, and planting amounted to approximately \$30 per acre. Prior to assigning a cost for land, and the labor of moving the fence, costs per head per day amount to less than 20 cents!

The Wolfingers are planning to make oats a regular part of the rotation on this farm. Thus, a typical rotation would include corn, soybeans, and then a year of wheat immediately followed by a second crop of mid-summer planted oats for winter pasture. They also expect to incorporate the near-by corn stalk fields on this farm into the winter feeding program for the cow herd.

While it’s apparent that oats are an excellent alternative that yield an abundant late summer and fall growth, there may be better seed choices if the goal is late winter and spring growth. Cereal rye established very easily in the fall, yet has more abundant growth in the spring

after emerging from dormancy. The corn stalk/rye photo was taken at the Hoover Farm near Millersport in Fairfield County. What you actually see is the result of two bushels of cereal rye that were flown into standing corn on October 2, 2002. On November 30, we observed a near perfect stand of 5 inch tall rye. Imagine what it might look like when flown on in mid August immediately before a timely rain. Aerial seeding costs were \$9.50 per acre plus the cost of the seed.

In fact, let's take this scenario one step further. Lots of previous research shows us that turnips are easily established in mid summer. In an effort to allow our pastures a rest, while adequately feeding the cow herd through the "summer slump" and then continuing into the winter, consider this:

- X Fly 2 pounds per acre of turnips into half your standing wheat in early to mid June, planning to begin grazing them in mid August.
- X Immediately after wheat harvest, seed the other half of the wheat acres to oats, planning to utilize them in early September as the turnips run out.
- X In mid August, fly 2 bushels of cereal rye into standing corn, planning to graze the rye/corn stalk mixture immediately after corn harvest.
- X In early September, fly 2 bushels of oats into standing soybeans, planning to graze this crop after the rye/corn stalks.

Next year, we plan to explore exactly this scenario. The objective will be to discover if timely aerial seeding of these annual and bi-annual forages into standing crops will allow for the wintering of cows while feeding essentially no harvested and stored forages. Stay tuned . . . and carefully consider the question, "Why would I want to plant oats in August?"

<http://fairfield.osu.edu/ag/beef/beefdec4.html>