

Annual forage blends with brassicas... really shine!

Choosing a crop for annual grazing is often a matter of habit or what's available, but cattlemen are finding forages designed for late season harvest can really pay off, with or without summer harvest as well. Union Forage specializes in forage blends that really yield in livestock operations. Brassicas are a big part of their annual forages.

The Coronation area can be pretty dry, so crops need to be in early to take advantage of early spring moisture and June rains if they come. But, with 800 cows to calve, Tim Smith doesn't have that luxury. He also has a custom silaging operation, so he wants to make putting up his winter feed as simple as possible. This year he believes he's found a forage crop that really works for him and for his cow herd – a blend of spring triticale with brassicas – a forage rape and a grazing turnip.

"I planned to seed in June for swath grazing, but things turned wet and I couldn't get them in until the first week of July," says



This is the crop that was so lush Tim silaged it, rather than letting the cattle trample half as they grazed.

canopied quickly so the crop was clean. And, with the rains we had every few days, it just kept going."

By silage harvest Smith was really curious to see what was there, so he cut

Smith's crop had a few frosts, but nothing that hard.

"After frost the leaves die back and wilt but it still looks like really nice pasture," he says. There's no problem

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Later in the winter, Smith plans to graze some late calving cows and their calves on the pasture. Even the regrowth after silage harvest was enough to graze – around 4 inches tall by early October.

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Smith. "Since then we've had good moisture and it looks like really nice pasture."

This year's strange moisture patterns that left his area with a second cut hay crop bigger than first, seem to have worked in his favour and made his delayed seeding close to ideal. Smith did a preseeding burnoff with glyphosate and seeded the spring triticale and brassicas directly into stubble with one pass at about half an inch.

"The triticale should have been deeper and the brassicas were a bit deeper than Graeme (Finn, of Union Forage) advised, but good rains and seeding a little heavier made for a decent crop," says Smith. "The triticale and the brassica mix all germinated together and

the headlands for silage.

"The swaths looked as good as any crop," he says. "It's a perfect mix with triticale for dry matter and energy and the brassicas for moisture and protein." By taking out the headlands, he's made himself a field that's easier to fence for swath grazing. Seeding across the rows that now all run the same way will be easier too.

In early October the regrowth was about 4 inches tall. When most of the calves are gone in November, he'll put the tail end of the calves on it in order to put some weight on them and get them onto feed.

The brassica keep growing until -10 C frost kills them. By early October

with the brassicas setting seed and getting too mature, they need 160 days to reach maturity. The turnips produce a carrot-like root, which will help with soil amending and add organic matter to improve the soil health.

Union Forage supplies seed for perennial as well as annual pastures, and Finn provides agronomic and grazing advice, especially during the winter, when he has time to discuss the merits of each forage species.

By Helen McMenamin

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