

From Auswest Seeds May 22, 2007

Italian ryegrass may be more lucrative than oats this autumn & winter

WITH oats seed expensive and in short supply, this season could be the year to try Italian ryegrass instead of oats as winter forage. The bonuses are likely to include an extended forage growth season, better animal performance, higher returns and a second year of forage production.

The feeding value of Italian ryegrass tends to be better than oats, especially later in the growth season, with nutritionists observing that young stock in particular perform much better than on oats.

A NSW comparison between oats and Italian ryegrass indicates similar costs but much greater returns from the ryegrass. The dry matter yields were obtained by NSW Department of Primary Industries in the Hunter Valley in 2006 under irrigated conditions, but similar yield differences could be expected in areas where ryegrass can be raingrown. This could mean even higher margins from ryegrass.

PGG Seeds territory manager Charlie Roberts, “After three grazings, oats stopped growing, while ryegrass – particularly Italian ryegrass – kept producing. This resulted in ryegrass having more than twice the grazing days available - 658 days compared with 290 for oats.

“Crusader ryegrass yielded more than twice as much feed as Coolibah oats - 12,345 kg of dry matter per ha compared with 5,437kg DM/ha from oats.

“In calculating the returns, we assumed that 70% of pasture was utilised by steers consuming 15kg DM/per head/per day and averaging 1kg liveweight gain per day. Beef returns were estimated at \$2.00 per kg. “This year oats prices are up at least **50%**, while the price of ryegrass, including Crusader, has barely changed.”

Estimated returns from Crusader Ryegrass vs Coolibah Oats

(Trial Results provided by NSW DPI, Scone 2006 from a replicated dry matter trial over 180 days)

	Coolibah Oats		Crusader Ryegrass
Income	\$/ha		\$/ha
Beef	\$576		\$1163
Variable Costs			
Preparation Including Glyphosate, Cultivation, Sowing	\$24		\$24
Cost of seed 100kg/ha x \$.80/kg	\$80		
20kg/ha x \$3.60/kg			\$80
Fertiliser DAP, Urea	\$147		\$147

Weed Control Grass weed control, Broadleaf control	\$12		\$12
Water 1ML per 1500kg DM per ha @ \$55 per ML	\$199		\$453
Total Variable Costs \$/ha	\$462		\$716
Gross Margin Income – Variable Costs	\$114		\$447

Mr Roberts reminded producers of the different planting times and depths for oats and ryegrass.

“Optimal planting time for ryegrass depends on local conditions of soil type, fertility, moisture and altitude. Oats are generally sown earlier in most areas with optimal soil temperatures ranging from 15-25 degrees; ryegrass is sown later into cooler soils from 10-16 degrees. Sowing depth also differs, with oats going in 25-50mm deep, and ryegrass much shallower at 10-20mm.”

Check with your seed supplier and local advisers about ideal planting times and conditions, and the suitability of planting raingrown or irrigated ryegrass instead of oats for your property this season.
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