**Consider seeding Galega in winter killed alfalfa fields!**

*Dr. Tarlok Singh Sahota CCA*

Unfortunately, there has been a lot of winter kill of alfalfa in Ontario this year. Due to auto toxicity, alfalfa cannot be seeded in the alfalfa killed fields. A good alternative is to seed Galega in these fields after killing alfalfa by Round UP; either immediately or after the first cut. Galega is a perennial forage legume from the Scandinavian countries. The plant has been reported to persist for 10-30 years! Our plots seeded at LUARS Thunder Bay in 2011 are still doing good. Its beautiful violet blue flowers have good quality nectar that attracts honeybees.

We have found that Galega was higher yielding (1 MT dry matter/ha/year - on an average of more than 7 years) and had better protein content (2-4 % higher) than alfalfa. We also found it more winter hardy and persistent than alfalfa and much faster to grow in early spring than alfalfa. Faster growth rate of Galega in early spring helps it to smother dandelions even in older stands. Whereas, alfalfa cannot compete with dandelions as it grows older. However, Galega’s ability to compete with weeds could be low at early establishment, which improves with the canopy development. Another beauty with Galega, as compared to alfalfa is, that it has a dense well/long retained canopy and its stem isn’t as hard as that of alfalfa; as a result its quality doesn’t come down as speedily as alfalfa after the first bloom. It is also rich in carotenes, minerals and vitamins, especially vitamin C. It is low in toxic alkaloids. Thus overall, it makes a good quality feed for livestock, especially for dairy cows. It may be grown as hay or silage and cut twice in the northwestern Ontario and probably 3-4 times in eastern/southern Ontario and Quebec (same number of cuts as in alfalfa). It has better retention of leaves after harvesting and drying for hay than alfalfa. Ideally, the crop should be direct seeded with good seed to soil contact and grown alone; though it can be grown with less competitive companion crops such as timothy and fescue. However, we have not tested combined cultivation of Galega with timothy or fescue or any other crop for that matter.

We tried seeding Galega @ 25, 35 and 45 kg seed rates/ha and found that 25 kg seed rate/ha was optimum for forage production for 3-4 years production cycle. However, seeding at 35 kg/ha proved better in the long run. Apply P and K as per soil test (same as for alfalfa), 24 kg S/ha through ammonium sulphate and 24 kg N/ha through urea at seeding/and every spring. Add any other nutrient that may be deficient in the soil. The crop is harvested when a few flowers are seen blooming (usually in the second week of June at Thunder Bay). Due to its early start in the spring, Galega is ready for harvesting a week before alfalfa. Dry matter yield spread was 55 % in the first cut and 45 % in the second cut; more or less the same as in alfalfa.

Latest research at LUARS Thunder Bay has indicated that for proper establishment/or weed control in Galega, it should be seeded after allowing the weeds to emerge and by killing the weeds by Round Up spray in spring/or summer or seeding Galega after a hay crop of barley (harvested after 60 days of seeding). In Southern Ontario, seeding Galega even after barley for silage could be okay. Galega seeded in mid July at LUARS Thunder Bay last year is showing very good stand this spring!

Galega seed may be obtained from Thunder Bay Feeds, Thunder Bay (Tel: 807-935-2921; email: info@thunderbayfeeds.com). If you have any questions about Galega, please refer to my article on Questions and Answers on Galega at:

 https://www.lakeheadu.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/3470/Documents/Extension\_Articles/Questions%20and%20Answers%20on%20Galega.pdf

Or, contact me at 807-707-1987/or tssahota@lakeehadu.ca

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