**Should I seed Winter Rye? If yes, how soon or how late?**

*Dr. Tarlok Singh Sahota CCA*

I would! Because, winter rye cultivation has several advantages:

* It acts as a cover crop during fall and winter; protecting soil.
* Its deep and dense root system will help tapping of left over nutrients from the previous crops, build up soil organic carbon and improve soil health.
* It can choke even difficult to control weeds such as wild oats!
* Even under sub optimal management, it can yield 2 MT/acre grains and an equal amount of straw/acre. The straw serves as a good bedding material for the livestock. Extra straw if any could be sold. There is a market for straw.
* Since it is seeded and harvested at different times as compared to the spring crops, it will help spreading/and easing out field operations.
* It is very winter hardy and its strong stem/straw prevents it from lodging.
* It is easy to market and it could find place in the beer industry.
* It will help crop diversification with rotational advantages.

**How soon or how late to seed winter rye?** We laid out an experiment on seeding dates in winter rye in the late summer/fall of 2017 to find out an answer to this question. The crop was harvested last summer. The results revealed that maximum grain (9,158 kg/ha) and straw (9,267 kg/ha) yields were obtained with seeding winter rye on September 15. The yields declined with preponing or delaying the seeding from September 15. Grain yields with August 25, September 5, September 25, October 5 and October 15 were 5,349, 6,628, 6,601, 5,803 and 4,704 kg/ha, respectively. The corresponding straw yields with seeding on these dates were 6,951, 7,993, 7,182, 5,957 and 6,110 kg/ha, respectively. Yields from September 5 and 25 seedings were similar and reasonably good. Even the yields with October 5 were not too low. This shows that winter rye has a wide window for seeding. We had grown Hazlet winter rye (at a seed rate of 450 seeds/m2 which would equal 315 kg seed/ha) after berseem clover green manuring that would have contributed some nitrogen. In addition, we applied 124 kg N/ha, 20 kg P2O5 and 20 kg K2O/ha at seeding. The crop grew 103-112 cm tall and didn’t lodge. No wonder we got very high yields, especially at the optimum seeding date (September 15; over 9 MT/ha).

Fall 2018 was very wet and the seeding conditions were relatively poor. We are yet to thresh this year’s harvest as at writing this note in mid August. However, from the visual observations it appeared that the crop seeded on August 25 had the best growth followed by September 5 and September 15 seedings (in declining order). The crop seeded after mid September was very poor (due to seeding under less than ideal conditions – wet fall). Therefore, the optimum time of seeding winter rye could vary with the years/and climatic conditions at seeding. However, seeding from August 25 to mid September could be recommended. And, even beyond that if you are willing to sacrifice some yield.

Any questions? Please feel free to contact me at tssahota@lakeheadu.ca/or at 807-707-1987.

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