

Swath Grazing Trial in Clearwater County: A CAFLA-Led Evaluation of Annual Cereal Forage

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Swath Grazing with Annual Cereal Crops

This season, a new series of plots has been designed to examine the effectiveness of swath grazing using annual cereal crops in west-central Alberta. The primary goal of the trial is to evaluate how well different forage species perform under swath grazing conditions and to track how their nutritional value changes over the winter.

Purpose and Approach

Throughout the winter season, forage samples will be collected for nutritional analysis. This will allow us to monitor any decline in key forage quality factors over time. While yield may also be considered as part of the evaluation, interpreting yield data could be challenging due to the differences in species and their preferred weather patterns.

The varieties selected for this project were chosen based on producer interest and their suitability for swath grazing in our region's unique climate. Both warm-season and cool-season grasses are being tested, each offering different benefits in terms of palatability, digestibility, and overall nutrition.

Warm-Season Grasses

The warm-season grasses in this trial include **Red Proso Millet** and **Golden German Millet**:

- **Red Proso Millet** is a short-stature, drought-tolerant option that exhibits rapid growth during the warm summer months. Its resilience makes it an appealing choice for variable summer conditions.
- **Golden German Millet** matures later than Red Proso and offers a higher yield potential. However, it is more susceptible to drought, which may limit its success in drier years.

Cool-Season Grasses

The cool-season grasses being evaluated are **AB Stampeder Triticale**, **Trical Surge Triticale**, and **Oats**:

- **AB Stampeder Triticale** is a reduced-awn variety bred specifically for forage production. The reduced awns help mitigate palatability issues that can be present in other triticale varieties.
- **Trical Surge Triticale** is an awnless forage variety, which further improves palatability and grazing acceptance.
- **Oats** are a familiar forage crop for many producers in the region and are being used as a baseline for comparison. Oats are well-known for their adaptability and consistent performance in our climate.



CAFLA staff alongside Clearwater County staff seeding the plots.

Establishment and Current Progress

Prior to seeding, the plots were worked and sprayed to reduce weed pressure. Seeding occurred on **June 18th, 2025**, using a no-till hoe drill. Given the **cooler temperatures and higher moisture** conditions experienced this season, the cool-season species are currently outperforming the warm-season options.

So far, the standout performers are the **Trical Surge Triticale** and **oats**. Both triticale varieties are beginning to head, with some plants starting to push out of the boot stage. The oats are slightly ahead, with many already having seeds emerging from the boot.

Next Steps

The plots will be swathed or cut in the fall to terminate growth. After that, forage samples will be taken periodically over the winter to assess changes in nutritional quality under swath grazing conditions.

This trial will provide valuable insights for producers in west-central Alberta who are interested in incorporating swath grazing into their operations, helping them make more informed decisions about forage species selection and management strategies.

