

All About Grazing: Grazing ... on corn silage stubble?

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Ohio State's David Zartman and student Kristin Mack put dairy heifers out to graze cereal rye and triticale planted after corn silage at the Waterman Dairy Center in Columbus.

Twenty-three acres of forage will provide grazing for at least 50 days for the 24 dairy heifers at Ohio State's Waterman Dairy Farm.

The day before Thanksgiving we put 24 dairy heifers out to graze on corn silage stubble at the Waterman Dairy Center on The Ohio State University Columbus campus. Are we trying to starve those poor heifers? Well, no, we just haven't told the whole story yet. There is much more for the heifers to graze than corn silage stubble alone. **More grazing.** In mid-September, forage-type varieties of cereal rye, spring triticale and winter triticale were no-till planted after the corn silage was harvested in that field. Nitrogen was applied at 50 pounds per acre (110 pounds of urea per acre) at planting. The forages were planted a bit later than desired. The cool summer delayed corn development and maturation. Then the rains interfered with planting.

But the cereal forages have grown well despite the cold weather through parts of October and November.

Dry matter. OSU student Kristin Mack measured total above ground forage mass with a rising plate meter, and found that 1,100 to 1,300 pounds of dry matter per acre was present. The rye and spring triticale have produced the most forage.

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The winter triticale is shorter, but has tillered out well and should provide excellent grazing in early spring.

Details. We estimate the 23 acres of forage will provide grazing for at least 50 days for the 24 dairy heifers (600-pound average weight per heifer).

The heifers will be strip-grazed through the pasture to maximize forage utilization. This pasture represents a significant savings in stored feed, simply by using land that would otherwise sit idle all fall and winter.

Stretching. Stretching the stored feed supply is very important from a cost savings perspective, but also because of the limited land base available to grow forages for our dairy herd on the Columbus campus. The rye and winter triticale should yield more grazing days in early spring before corn silage is planted back into that field.

Last year annual ryegrass was planted after corn silage in that same field. The heifers gained 1.8 pounds per day during last winter's grazing period with only mineral supplementation. Supplemental feed was supplied only during five days of frozen conditions.
Gains. We expect the same gains on the cereal forage this year, with more carrying capacity than last year.

This project is being led by Kristin Mack, one of our seniors in the Department of Animal Sciences, under the direction of David Zartman.

We have to brag on Kristin, because she won first place in the Ohio Forage and Grassland Council's Youth Essay Contest for her age group this year. Her essay and others from Ohio will compete in the American Forage and Grassland Council's Youth Essay Contest.

If you would like more information about those competitions, please contact Mark Sulc at sulc.2@osu.edu. In the coming months, results of this and other winter grazing studies in Ohio will be shared in this column.

Active team. We have an active team here in Ohio involved with producers to learn how to extend grazing and reduce reliance on stored forages.

Most of our winter-grazing evaluations are being conducted on producer farms. Several species and winter annual forage establishment practices are being evaluated, including aerial seeding.

We are evaluating nitrogen management and cycling and the effects of winter grazing on subsequent row crop yields.

We will also develop cost-benefit analyses for the system of integrating grazing with row crop

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production. **Thinking ahead.** As you read about these evaluations in the coming months, be thinking about how you can utilize cropland that sits idle from fall to spring. Integrating livestock grazing with row crops has many potential benefits, but it requires good management. We are working on developing sound management guidelines for successfully integrating row crop production and grazing.

Please share your ideas on this and any other topic discussed in this column. **Internet help.** And don't forget to check out the educational events being planned and the resources on grazing, forage management, and livestock management at the following Web sites: <http://forages.osu.edu>; <http://dairy.osu.edu>; and <http://beef.osu.edu>.

(Mark Sulc and David Zartman are professors at The Ohio State University. Student Kristin Mack also contributed to this article. Questions and comments can be sent in care of Farm and Dairy, P.O. Box 38, Salem, OH 44460.)