

OUR EXPERIENCE WITH ANNUALS ON SHEEP

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Our goals with the annual grazing crops are to:

1. Shorten the length of time we have to feed hay and other stored feeds.
2. Get a high volume of feed from a limited acreage on which to graze.

The annuals we used or have tried in the last few years include: Sorghum-Sudangrass, rye, turnips, ryegrass and winter wheat. The latter two have winter killed rather easy and were discontinued here.

We are now planting Sorghum-Sudangrass (Brown Midrib) behind rye. The Brown-Midrib is warm seasons grass that produces a high tonnage of feed that the animals find very palatable. They will eat it right down to the ground. It is very hard once it gets a root system established and will come back quickly with little moisture for several rotations of grazing. It is usually grazed when it is 18 to 24 inches high. We usually try to be done grazing it before the first killing frost to avoid the prussic acid that results.

The rye has been the best for our early spring grazing. It is winter hardy and with fast regrowth for several rounds of grazing. Rye allows us to get the ewes out of the barn in early spring before the permanent pastures are ready to be grazed.

Turnips have been used at Purdue over the years. They work very well and can be grazed well into the winter. They are very palatable and the sheep do very well on them. However the past few years we have had a plentiful supply of crop residue and dormant alfalfa on which to graze during that time of year.

Some of the disadvantages include a good seedbed for the turnips and the usual lack of moisture when seeding in late July. The typical small sheep producer in Indiana will not have the needed equipment to put out the crops. Having it custom done will not make it a high priority due to the small acreage required to graze a large number of animals.

In conclusion the annual crops have decreased our needed winter feed supply. Additionally these annual crops have supplemented our permanent pastures during dry summers. We have found that grazing these annuals have made it easy to maintain the body condition and reproductive performance of the ewes.