WISCONSIN-Integrating Winter Forage Cover Crops into Central Wisconsin Crop Production Systems

Jason Cavadini, University of Wisconsin

This study compared performance and profitability of three systems in Central Wisconsin: fall-seeded triticale harvested as spring forage followed by short-maturity soybeans (TCS), fall-seeded triticale chemically killed in the spring followed by full-season-maturity soybeans (TKS), and full-season-maturity soybeans following no cover crop (NCS). Treatments were established October 1, 2015, when triticale was no-till drilled into corn silage residue at the Marshfield Agricultural Research Station.

Conclusions. Triticale fall planted as a cover crop can provide an ideal forage for livestock farmers with its yield and quality potential. Not only is it an ideal feed, it is also an exceptional cover crop. It can be planted successfully late into the fall, and can provide many Midwest farmers with opportunities to protect and build soils with cover crops. Harvesting triticale is a good control option as well. Cutting the cover crop is a good alternative to an early herbicide application, and sets back weed growth until a normal post-emerge application is needed on the subsequent soybean crop. Results of this study show later planting date and shorter maturity may result in lower soybean yield, but it appears to be partially driven by fall weather. Soybean yield was not affected in a normal fall with a normal frost date, but was negatively affected in a fall with a later than normal frost date. Despite the possibility of lower subsequent soybean yields in the TCS system, triticale forage can help offset costs. Triticale forage followed by soybeans provides Midwest farmers with a unique opportunity to double-crop. The TCS system showed potential to increase profitability in a year with a normal fall, compared to a conventional system in which only soybeans were grown. In short, without even considering the value of the cover crop, the value of forage alone can add profitability to a system.

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