Forage Research Updates *Compiled and edited by Paul Peterson, University of Minnesota*

Minnesota - 2010 Explosive So Far for Perennial Ryegrass

by P. Peterson, University of Minnesota

Through July 2010, perennial ryegrass plots seeded August 2009 in St. Paul have already averaged 4.6 ton DM/ac; 20% of plots have produced over 5.0 ton DM/ac. How? Abundant rainfall, fertile soil, and good genetics, following a gentle winter. Is this an unusual year? Indeed, but nonetheless the potential being demonstrated is impressive and noteworthy.

With its high quality and palatability, perennial ryegrass is the species of choice in parts of the world where forage grass is highly valued and well managed. Compared to Minnesota, however, these regions tend to have more moderate summer and winter weather. While Minnesota's climate is too extreme for widespread monoculture plantings of perennial ryegrass, this grass is too good to not consider using strategically. The St. Paul trial is collaborative with Barenbrug. Soil fertility is due to previous composted dairy manure incorporation. N fertilizer is applied at ~40 lbs N/ac/cutting, with 3 cuttings so far. Two more cuttings are expected this year. The seeding was 'drilled' with a small-plot seeder at the end of August 2009 and emerged slowly and variably due to late summer drought. There was concern that seedlings had not developed enough to survive winter, but that was not so. Producers should consider experimenting with good, modern perennial ryegrass varieties on a small scale. Its greatest potential is where soil fertility is high and soil water-holding capacity is good, in mixtures together with more long-lived grass, and/or in a short rotation. It can be difficult to wilt to hay moisture, so pasture and silage/baleage are its best use.