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PRODUCERS LOOKING AT SPRING PLANTED OATS

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AMARILLO-Poor wheat prospects have some Panhandle and South Plains growers looking for alternate crops to plant this spring. Oats may fit the bill, say Texas Cooperative Extension agronomists, Drs. Brent Bean of Amarillo and Calvin Trostle of Lubbock.

Clearly, the 2004 area wheat crop has gotten off to a poor start. A few farmers who planted following late summer rains had early season growth for grazing. There has been little rain or snow through the fall and early winter. Single digit temperatures recorded in January also reduced wheat stands. Precipitation in mid-January has helped the outlook in some parts of the of the region, but in many cases it was too little too late, the agronomists explained.

"Spring-planted oats are used forage, hay, or grain. Planting dates run between February 10 and March 15. South Plains farmers should try to plant early during this window," Trostle said.

"Panhandle growers will have more success by planting later," said Bean, "Oats will germinate at soil temperatures as low as 40 degrees, and emerge and grow quicker with warmer temperatures."

"Soil moisture and temperature are key in determining how fast the plant will develop," Trostle said. The time between planting and grain harvest also varies greatly from year to year. A 10 day delay in planting will not necessarily mean a 10 day delay in maturity. Research in Nebraska suggests that for every three or four days planting is delayed maturity will be delayed approximately one day.

Methods for planting oats and wheat are similar. General seeding rates recommended are 50 pounds per acre for dryland and 90 to 100 pounds per acre for irrigated crops. Keep in mind when comparing oat prices that there are only 32 pounds of oats per bushel, the agronomists said.

Bean and Trostle also suggest lower seeding rates may potentially be used without significantly affecting yield. Their recent tests featured Walken and Troy varieties with seeding rates of 50 and 100 lbs per acre. They saw little difference in yields for forage and hay grown at Bushland and Lubbock in 2002 and 2003. At Bushland last year, the grain yield was lower with a reduced seeding rate.

But what about nitrogen requirements? Bean said oats will need a similar amount to that used when topdressing in wheat. Forty to 60 pounds per acre of applied material is usually sufficient for most yield goals.

Winter weeds, when present, can be controlled by tillage or herbicide prior to planting. Glyphosate, commonly referred to as Roundup, should be effective on most weeds and grasses and would not force a delay in planting like 2,4-D. If 2,4-D is used, oats should not be planted for a minimum of 10 days. Once the crop is established, labeled herbicides include 2,4-D, Aim, Glean, Buctril, and Peak. Ally is not labeled for use in oats.

Choice of variety depends on how oats are to be used - grazed by livestock, grown for hay, or grain production. The 3-year variety trials by Bean and Trostle have led them to recommend Walken, Troy, and Monida oats for grazing. For hay production, they suggest Charisma, Magnum, Monida, Troy and Walken varieties. If grain is the objective then plant Dallas, Jerry, Nora, and Monida for in the Panhandle. In the South Plains, try Dallas, Jerry, Monida, Troy, and Hytest.

Brand names appearing in this article are used for product identification. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism of similar products not mentioned.

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