

WHY CONSIDER ITALIAN RYEGRASS – GREEN SPIRIT – AS A CROP IN YOUR ROTATION

By Dieter Härle, Nutrition-Agronomy Consultant, Barenbrug USA

Challenge: Split your nearby corn silage field and plant Italian Ryegrass – Green Spirit (by Barenbrug). Producers can seed this grass at less than half the cost of corn silage. For comparison purposes, review the following trial data from the University of Wisconsin (Arlington Station) for tonnage yield as well as milk/acre and milk/ton.

2007 Forage Yields and Quality

Crop	DM t/a	Avg. Protein	%NDF	%NDFD	# milk/acre	lbs milk/ton
Alfalfa	4.57	27.2	33.2	49.4	16,331	3,252
Green Spirit 25*	9.11	23.8	45.7	73.3	30,705	3,370
Corn silage	10.4	7.0	46.8	53.8	34,245 (31.4 starch)	3,309

2008 Forage Yields and Quality

Crop	DM t/a	Avg. Protein	%NDF	%NDFD	#milk/acre	lbs milk/ton
Alfalfa	4.57	27.2	26.7	59.9	18,152	3,252
Green Spirit 35*	8.76	16.9	46.8	71.7	30,383	3,410
Corn silage	10.5	7.0	48.3	55.4	34,107	3,309
Soybeans	3.87	18.9	36.6	59.9	13,918	3,596

* indicates cutting – harvesting – interval of 25 days and 35 days respectively in a 4 cut season average

Incorporating grass into the forage program is becoming a critical economical consideration. It is an excellent quality feed for dairy cows, heifers and even finishing beef, due to its high digestibility and palatability, (i.e., more milk per ton of forage than alfalfa, higher protein and little starch compared to corn silage).

With regard to rotation, producers have discovered Green Spirit Italian Ryegrass (Barenbrug) can improve yields compared to raising corn on corn. Additionally, producers have another good reason during the summer to use their “liquid gold” at full fertilizer values after each cut!

Another advantage grasses have is that they bounce back after drought much stronger than alfalfa does after rain, while possibly having one smaller cut after a lack of moisture for a typical midwestern summer dry spell.

Look at alfalfa stands now and if the stand justifies direct drill seeding, consider Italian Ryegrass.

The benefits grasses hold for herds is demonstrated by the Lardinois Farm, near Pulaski, WI. “Grass works for us,” says Randy Lardinois. “Our herd has seen a steady improvement in production since incorporating a grass blend haylage in September 2007.”



Italian Rye-Grass in Trials – this is 5th crop growing for one more cut in October.

Bill Matzke, the attending dairy nutritionist and consultant, reports the lactating diet averages 55% forage on a dry matter basis. Alfalfa haylage samples from farms located inside a 10 mile radius from Lardinois farms average 40.6% NDFd, while haylage samples from Lardinois Farms average 65.2 NDFd.

“We really did not change the diet very much when we incorporated the grass haylage” Matzke notes. Palatability and good particle length eased incorporation.

Other herd improvements noted were:

- Less acidosis
- Healthier cows – less laminitis
- Improved breeding
- Similar yields to alfalfa
- Higher digestible forage dry matter
- High forage quality value

Lardinois herd numbers:

- 25,806 lbs milk
- 980 lbs butter fat
- 748 lbs milk protein
- 2 X – no Bst
- 480 cows (27% 1st Lactation; 33% 2nd Lactation; 40% > 3rd Lactation)

Why not consider grass? Be sure to seed as early as possible in the spring. For perennials, August is an excellent time to establish a stand. Please contact Dieter Härle at dietharle@netexpress.net or Doug Gunnink, Agronomy Consultant, at dgunnink@myclearwave.net with any questions.