

# Ryelage harvesting on upswing

LANCASTER — Was there more ryelage harvesting than usual in Lancaster and surrounding counties this year?

If the number of choppers — both pull-type and self-propelled — spotted in fields recently is any indication, the cutting of rye for silage is definitely up.

John Baylor, Extension agronomist at Penn State, echoes the observation.

"I haven't seen any figures or data but I would expect that due to last season's drought and the resulting shortage of feed, a lot more farmers planted rye as a winter cover for chopping this spring," he said.

With the double-cropping of the rye in corn fields, these farmers not only got added production efficiency out of their fields, but got a head start on the refilling of silos, whose drought-diminished levels were drawn down more than usual over the past winter.

"Rye is about the best cover crop for this area," according to Baylor, "because it is more resistant to atrazine than the other cereal crops."

But there are a couple of tricks-of-the-trade that are important in the harvesting of the ryelage, Baylor added.

First, the rye should be harvested at the proper stage of development. The best time for cutting, to get top protein and highest digestibility, preferably with a mower-conditioner to aid the wilting, is just before the rye heads. It then can be wilted to about 55 percent moisture before ensiling.

After the rye heads, its value as a feed drops quite significantly, along with its intake by the herd.

Also, since rye is a hollow-stemmed plant, it's recommended that good silage-making practices be followed, including a fine chop, effective packing and fast, proper sealing in the silo.

The level of wilt needs to be watched since over-wilting causes an excessive loss in weight and makes good packing even more difficult.

As far as the feeding is concerned, ryelage likely will need to be supplemented according to the nutritive value of a particular harvest. It provides higher protein than corn but less than alfalfa certainly. It is also lower in energy than corn.

In general, cereal crops harvested as silage have lower nutritive value than the legumes and corn and will need to be supplemented.

Will the harvesting of ryelage become an increasing trend in the future?

There are several indications that it may.

First, last year's drought-plagued growing season showed that the harvesting of rye or other cereal crops can provide a good head start at replenishing supplies.

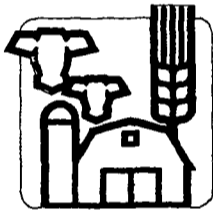
As more and more emphasis is placed on preventing soil erosion, the importance of rye as a winter cover sandwiched between corn crops will correspondingly increase.

Finally, today's farm economics more and more are dictating that existing land resources be utilized as efficiently as possible. And double-cropping rye and corn is one way to get that added value. — DA



This harvesting scene of chopping rye for silage was quite common in Lancaster and surrounding counties recently as farmers sought to get a head start on replenishing their

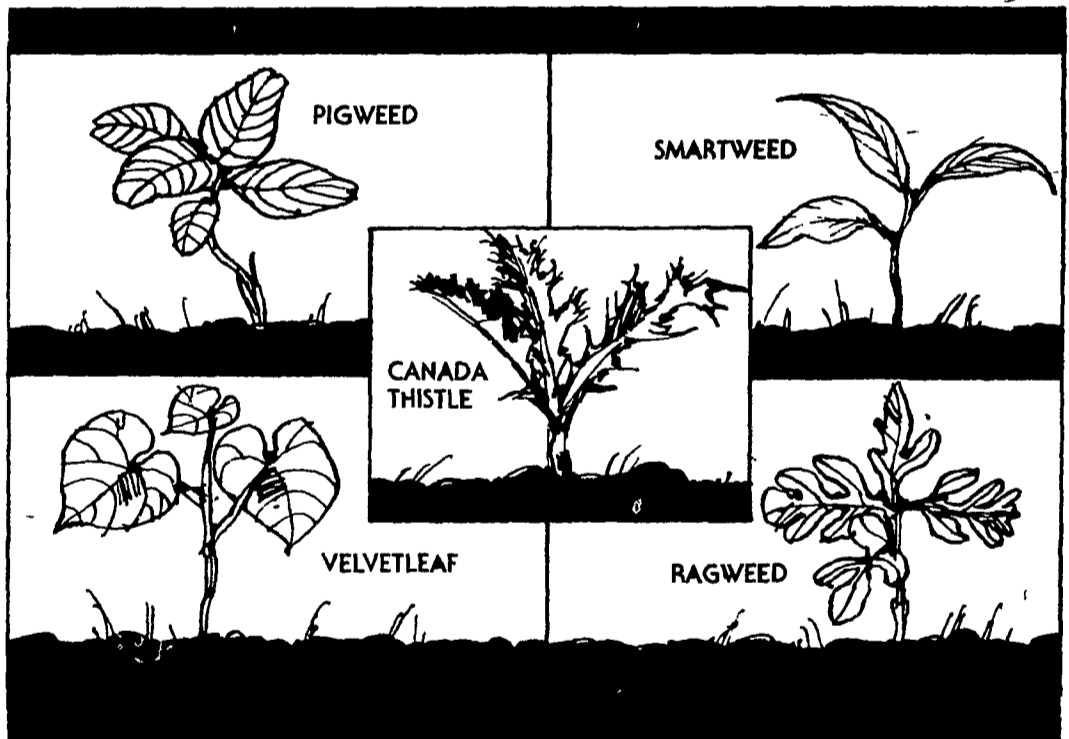
drought-diminished feed supplies. Increasing concern over soil erosion is also boosting rye as a winter cover between corn crops.



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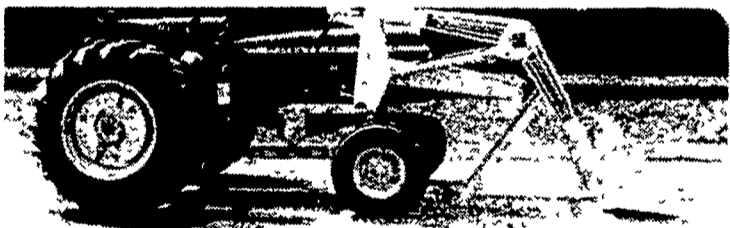
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