

Turnips, rape, swede & kale being tested

Berks dairymen report on their brassicas

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BERNVILLE — There is a new type of crop being planted and harvested this year in Berks County as well as in several additional counties across the state. In the search for an alternative forage crop with a performance comparable to corn or alfalfa, several dairymen are turning to brassicas — turnips, rape, swede and kale.

While the results from these trials are varied and far from conclusive as yet, the initial reports from these plantings and those from last year, (the first year of the trials in Berks), give reason to further research and compare this novel family of forages.

"They (brassicas) are highly nutritious and palatable," states Harry Schaeffer, Berks county agent. "They produce at a time of year when there is not too much else growing," he explains.

Schaeffer is currently working

with the farmers in Berks who have agreed to plant and utilize brassicas under recommendations from Penn State. Making visits to the farms and overseeing the various management practices that are being followed with this crop, Schaeffer is compiling the data from these trial plots as a source of additional information needed in researching the performance and practicality of this crop.

The forage is tested for its protein and TDN values. Different planting and harvesting practices have also been tried and professional observations, as well as the farmers' comments are recorded.

"I think we still have a lot to learn yet," Schaeffer states.

"For pasture systems, they are really good. They may have a place for livestock or dairy operators who grow stored feeds," he adds, but maintains that additional research and experimentation in different situations is still needed to



Rape field at Stan Fox and Don Bair farm was mowed off and allowed to regrow for grazing. Although mowing reduced insect damage, some problems have been encountered with foxtail.



Although admitting that moving fence daily to graze brassicas was a nuisance, Stan Fox, right, and Don Bair adopted easy way to do daily chore. They cemented a pole in a tire and wire was stretched and held tight with a garage door spring. Bair said it took about 10 minutes a day to move fence.

determine the future value of this crop.

"It did what we wanted it to do," states Don Bair, R1, Palm, about the ten acres of turnips and rape that he planted. Bair and his father-in-law, Stan Fox, farm 270 acres in the eastern corner of Berks County. They maintain a herd of 71 Holsteins and like to utilize a lot of pasture to save hay for the severe winter months.

"We were looking for more pasture," Bair continues to explain. They planted five acres of turnips and five acres of rape. Cows were strip grazed and block grazed and the regrowth on the current plantings will provide additional grazing up to December. The fence was moved every day as needed and the cows readily accepted the new forage, according to Bair.

They did have some problems with insect damage from the imported cabbage worm. In an effort to eradicate this and try again, the first planting of rape was mowed off and put in the silo. Although brassicas have proved less than desirable for the silo because of abnormal fermentation and a great amount of juicing, Bair states that they did not have this problem. He adds that the rape was wilted first and then was rained on and had to be dried further. He states that they mowed it on a Saturday and on Wednesday



Turnip field was grazed and is now in third week of regrowth. Always a low fertility field, according to Lynn Stoudt, the turnips are coming up well even though cows pulled many out.

ensiled it. "It's working real good in the silo," he says, but adds, "our intentions were not to store it."

Bair and Fox maintain that their purpose is to develop a better pasture system and will continue to work with brassicas with that goal in mind. The regrowth on the rape is doing real good and should be ready for grazing later this fall.

Turnips and rape are planted in the spring. On these crops of brassicas, there is a regrowth after being grazed or harvested at 90 days. Swedes and kale give one harvest in the late fall after being planted in the spring. Their production equals or betters that of the two harvests of turnips or rape. Schaeffer states that the brassicas are "fertilizer hungry," and advises farmers to follow the 75-75-75 fertilizer recommendations of Penn State.

Bair and Fox did get to pasture the turnips that they planted however but comment, "we don't think we will go for a regrowth on turnips again. You can't tell the cows not to pull them out." They had to reseed the five acres of

turnips after the initial grazing. Although the fence was moved daily and the time in the field was monitored, cows still pulled out the entire turnip and ate it instead of only grazing the tops. This results in the regrowth of the field with many bare or weedy spots. Bair also cautions, "if you are after regrowth, don't let it get too high."

Bair did not experience any odor problems in his milk from feeding brassicas and plans on planting some again next year. "It was a nuisance to move fence every day," he admits, but "generally this time of year with lousy pasture, milk production drops. It didn't this year." "My idea was to save as much of my hay for winter. We normally have to feed a lot more hay to make up for the pasture."

With his no-till planting of the brassicas, Bair's crop tested in at 21.2% crude protein on the rape and 24.2% protein on the turnips. The TDN value on the two crops was 63.50. Protein on a dry matter basis tested at 17% on the rape and

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Ag bags have been used by Lynn Stoudt since 1980 and latest crop to be stored in them are his brassicas.