

Dried Flowers, Herbs, and Cover Crop Sold as Seasonal Decoration: Enterprise Analysis on A Small Diversified Farm



Cover crop, herbs, and flowers provide unique opportunities for small farm owners interested in diversification, increasing profit, and season extension. Each year small farms spend time cutting back flowers, herbs, or cover crop to improve health, stimulate production, or prepare ground for new crops. The freshly cut material is normally left in the field. This grant analyzed the profitability of enterprises that utilize the freshly cut material in decorative and edible value-added products.

Crop: Winter Rye (*Secale cereal*)

Rye is commonly planted as a cover crop to reduce erosion and increase organic matter. In the spring the crop is mowed and tilled into the soil. In addition to its use as a cover crop it can also be considered an ornamental grass within the floral industry.

Introduction:

Silver Tip Rye, a specialty ornamental grass seed, and our Rye cover crop were cultivated and analyzed to determine the most profitable way to sell decorative rye.

Marketing:

Retail:

- Rye from fall-seeded cover crop was bunched and sold at a farmer's market on the three consecutive weekends before Thanksgiving. Twenty bunches with an average of 3" circumference and 25" tall were made and sold at a price of \$4 each. Sixty percent of the decorative bunches sold the weekend before Thanksgiving.
- Silver Tip Rye was included in sorghum wreaths as an accent.
- Rye can be sold anywhere fresh flower bouquets are traditionally sold.

Added Value:

- After drying, no additional value was added to the bunches. Jute twine, burlap, or floral sleeves could increase marketability of the product. Rye can also be included in fresh or dried floral bouquets.

Why Buy Dried Rye?

Rye is used as a decoration on its own or included in bouquets or wreaths.

Growing Practices:

- Rye is seeded in the fall as a cover crop. This crop was seeded with a grain drill, however many tools can be used to spread cover crop. The following tools have been used in previous years: 3 pt. Broad Cast Seeder and Earthway EV-N-Spread.
- Silver Tip Rye was direct seeded with an Earthway Precision Garden Seeder using plate 18112-Popcorn on bare ground with subsoil drip tape. We made two passes with the seeder on the same row and this was not enough seed per row. It was basket weeded once and hand weeded once.

Harvest Post-Harvest:

Tools: shears, rubber bands, crate

Harvest rye on a dry day. Clip stem at the desired length, strip leaves, and then bunch stems in the field using a rubber band. Place bunches in a crate.

Post-Harvest:

Using twine or rope, slide material through rubber bands and hang the strand to dry in a dark, well ventilated location. Leave it to dry for three weeks and use as needed. Rye can be stored for months until sale.



Data:

	Labor (minutes)	Total Stems	Broken Stems	Bunches	Price	Profit	Cost of Production	Net Profit
Cover Crop	166.78	1082	0	20	4	80	55.59	\$24.40
Silver Tip	67.56	216	9	2	NA	0	38.52	-\$38.51

Results:

Silver Tip Rye did not perform well in the summer heat. Stems were short (on average less than 12”) and seed heads were not uniform. However, Rye that was seeded as a cover crop was much taller, densely planted, and the seed heads were uniform with little or no defects.

Conclusion:

Selling your rye cover crop as a decorative bunch, or in fresh or dried floral bouquets is profitable and can offset the costs of planting, mowing, or plowing cover crop. Harvesting stems in the spring and letting the dried bunches hang until fall for sales did not affect the quality of the product. Additionally, rye performs much better in the cooler months and this also corresponds to more flexible labor hours. August was not an ideal time to harvest the ornamental rye.

Lastly, there was not a remarkable difference between the cover crop seed head and the ornamental seed head despite the steep price of ornamental seed.

Additional Resources:

University of Main Cooperative Extension Winter Rye Variety Trial 2017 Result, Ellen Mallory and Tom Malloy <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1275/https://extension.umaine.edu/grains-oilseeds/topics/winter-rye-variety-trial-2017-results/>

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