

Grazing Sheep on Sorghum Sudan

Our purpose in carrying out this project was to try and overcome the effects of summer slump, a problem with both our dairy herd and flock of sheep. We have successfully used sorghum sudan for our cows, and would now like to try and implement it's use with our sheep.

We selected two varieties of sudan one conventional and the other a newer BMR, with increased palatability, we also used Mega Millet, a forage millet which we have seen used for cows with great results. By use of soil testing done with Fertrell, we added high calcium lime to balance pH and Ca levels, and were able to supply all plant needs with our composted manure, one application was made before mold board plowing and another will be made as a top dress after grazing the first time. Plant as early as possible as long as soil temp. is 60 degrees and soil can be worked. We prefer to drill rather than broadcast seed as we get a more uniform seeding.

In our case the Mega Millet was pretty much a loss as this crop needs drier and much warmer conditions than we experienced this year. This however does not rule out the crop for consideration another year.

We began grazing at 18 inches, by the use of flexi net fencing we sectioned off a new piece for the ewes each morning, giving only what they would consume during the day, at night they were returned to a grass/legume paddock. Each day a back fence would also be moved to prevent back grazing. Moving the fence sounds time consuming but once set-up could be moved by my 13 year old son while I milked.

We found that the grass that they grazed first and also the most was the BMR variety. This was very noticeable, to the point that we might exclude the conventional part of the field and use it for balage as the ewes are wasting too much of that forage while they keep returning to the BMR.

Our ewes were all body condition scored and will be redone at the end of the project, the dairy ewes are also having their milk weights recorded as well as butterfat content to see if there are any changes in daily production. already we have noticed an increase in total daily production.

There seemed to not be any problem with the ewes accepting the sudan, right from day one they have readily accepted it and we have had no bad effects other than a much looser manure being observed, this was part of the reason we return the ewes to grass/legume paddocks at night.

We will be doing analysis on the sudan and that information along with yield checks will be available later.

We thank you for coming on our pasture walk, we welcome your questions and comments and welcome you back later in the season if you have further interest in the project

Thanks , The Coulters