

Merino Matters



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WHY GRAZE CROPS

Grazing Crops

- Crops can be used during winter to provide green feed and still be harvested for grain.
- Growth rates of crops are generally 30-50 kg DM/ha/day during winter, vs rates of 5-10 kg DM/ha/day for pasture.
- This early biomass can allow animal condition to be maintained and/or improved, pastures can be deferred and reduced supplementation.
- Crops that have grown to a reasonable height will provide lambs better shelter from the wind and ewes with enough feed to stay at the birth site, improving lamb survival.
- Grazed crops may also have a reduced risk of frost damage, and lower levels of leaf disease.

Tips on grazing crops

- Use twist test to commence grazing cereals (Canola 6-8 leaf). When the sheep can't easily pull the plants out of the ground, they are safe to graze.
- Do not put sheep in within a week of applying nitrogen fertilisers.
- Ensure that sheep are up to date with their vaccinations as pulpy kidney is a risk in lush crops.
- Try to fill the sheep up before they go into the crop, or introduce them slowly over a few days.
- Provide a source of roughage, straw is fine, as the rapidly growing crops will be low in fibre.
- To maximise animal production in cereals, use loose lick of equal parts Causmag®, ground limestone and salt.
- Do not graze past the white line or after elongation commences, (, (for cereals GS 30, Canola leave 100mm).
- Apply nitrogen after grazing to aid recovery of the crop
- Grazing weedy crops may lead to a yield penalty due to increased competition.

Key Messages

- Grazing crops can increase returns to cropped paddocks and allow pastures to be deferred, however seasonal constraints can affect both the timing of grazing and the yield and grain quality from the crops.
- Grazing existing varieties and planting earlier is likely to be the best option. This can allow early grazing, reducing disease and frost risk with little effect on yield.
- Longer season varieties may struggle to finish after grazing, especially if they are not planted early and there is little follow up rain.
- You can graze your crops then shut them up for grain production.
- Alternatively trash oats or barley into pasture paddocks with poor production prospects, generating the feed you need for an extended period, and providing improved ground cover next summer.

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