

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Small Grain Cereal Options

With parts of the area recently receiving beneficial moisture, and some forage supplies remaining tight, you might be considering a small grain cereal for grazing/haying this fall/winter. A companion article by District Livestock and Natural Resources Agent Ross Mosteller focuses on the animal side of using cereal crops (<https://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/livestock-natresource/> ; see News Articles at the bottom of the page). This article focuses on general agronomic practices.

The planting window for most winter cereals is now through late September for rye and triticale and extends into the first 10 days of October for wheat. Earlier planting *typically* equals greater production plus a better chance to get plants established adequately so grazing can begin. Planting later can work, but forage production may be reduced or establishment slowed.

Seed small grain cereals at a rate about 25 to 50 percent *above* normal to provide earlier fall forage. A good ballpark rate for most cereals is 75 to 100 pounds per acre. Oats will be a little less – but don't skimp if you want to maximize production. If oats are your choice, consider these points: 1) they *can* be seeded in the fall and can provide quite a bit of forage if planted early or a hard freeze (mid 20's) allows them a long growing season 2) they *can* be planted with other winter small grains and 3) seedlings *are* susceptible to atrazine, so be cautious after corn.

Nitrogen fertilizer rates should be 30-50 pounds above typical when grazing (use similar rates recommended for grain production if going to silage/hay). If previous soil tests suggest a need for other nutrients, they will likely be needed for cereal production as well unless higher than needed fertilizer rates were applied to the previous crop. Consider split applications at higher rates to prevent lodging. If you are taking the crop to grain after grazing, a split application should be made with the last half of the nitrogen applied after animals are removed.

Good information is available upon request for dual purpose wheat varieties. Less information is readily available for other cereal crops. If you have not done so, start lining up seed as supplies may be tight.

Small grain cereal crops can help extend forage supplies while allowing us to use summer crop residues and providing often-needed winter ground cover all at the same time. If you want more information on different options, check out Small Grain Cereals for Forage available from District Offices or: <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF1072.pdf> .