

Small grains show strong results



Getting Started

By BOB GUNZENHAUSER

SO far so good as far as the crops go. The early planted corn started tasselling just before the Fourth of July, with the rest of it tasseled within

Key Points

- Small grains offer an improved return vs. soybeans or corn.
- More acres will go to soft red winter wheat if price can be locked in.
- Baled straw improves potential for added income for new crop.

a week. Even some of the soybeans started flowering about this time.

Small grains did surprisingly well for us this year. We had 21 acres of soft red winter wheat and 4 acres of oats, both in the same field. The small area of oats was due to running out of wheat and needing something to fill in. The wheat yielded 69 bushels per acre with a test weight of 61 pounds per bushel. The oats were even better, producing 115 bushels per acre with a test weight of 35 pounds per bushel. This was in a part of the field that produced 30 bushels per

acre of soybeans last year, and maybe 100 bushels per acre of corn two years ago.

We sold the wheat off the truck to an elevator in Trenton, Mo. It was the nearest location to us, and they had a great price. I intend to plant around 85 acres of soft wheat next year, especially if I can lock in some prices for 2007 delivery. The return per acre is just about as good as soybeans, if not better, and it helps spread out the harvest load.

I drilled these small grains because my landlord intends to put in terraces this summer on this particular field. She was able to get a 75% cost share from the USDA, as this farm lies in a particular select sub-watershed of Rathbun Lake. Having the crops off now means the terrace work can start and finish sooner. These terraces should really improve the soil conservation of the farm, and make it easier to farm (no more waterway/ditches to bounce through).

Turning straw to cash

I had the straw baled off both the wheat and oat acreages. The wheat produced 63 large round net-wrapped bales, which I intend to sell to any interested parties. (E-mail me if you are one of those interested parties.) However, we had the oat straw small-square-baled. With fewer small straw bales produced in my area each year, there is still a demand for a few square bales for various uses: garden mulch, insulation for the base of trailer houses and dog houses, and bedding during calving season.

My wife, Jackie, insisted on helping put up these bales with me, as she liked doing this work back on her home farm in northeast Iowa. I wasn't about to turn down that labor offer. So, we brought the kids out to the field and stacked bales onto a trailer on my truck.

Graydon, now 3, really enjoyed getting up higher and higher as we put more straw on the trailer. Sometimes a bale landed end-up from the baler, so it became his job to go knock those over. We finished just before a small sprinkle. The baler counter showed we had made 316 bales, but we soon found that was off. We picked up 385.

Now I understand why fewer people put up small bales anymore. Thank goodness for big round and square bales, hydraulic loaders, and other modern advancements in hay production! Fortunately, we stored these smaller bales in my seed building at ground level, (a former lumberyard in town), which requires unloading at ground level. No running the bales up elevators and stacking in a 100-degree haymow.

Now, if we could catch some more rain, we'd be set.

Editor's Note: Bob Gunzenhauser was the winner of the "Farming is in your Blood" contest sponsored by Wallace Farmer, Bayer CropScience, the Iowa Soybean Association and the Iowa Corn Growers Association.

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Got a question for Bob? Send it to farmbob@farmprogress.com and he'll try to answer it in a future issue.