

Elstel Farm & Seeds

“The Crabgrass Seed Folks”

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Fact Sheet 2005

Red River Crabgrass Hay

Red River Crabgrass (RRCG) is a researched and selected variety of crabgrass (*Digitaria ciliaris*) released by Noble Foundation. It is a warm season grass easily managed for volunteer stands. We have worked with crabgrass forages since 1972 and with RRCG since 1974 when it was just a research number. The “native“ crabgrasses are lower in production with other undesirable traits, and they can be drastically lower in production than RRCG. RRCG is used primarily for grazing, hay or baleage, and soil conservation. It is grazed well by cattle, horses, sheep, goats, exotics, and hogs. It is used as a single crop, double crop with winter annuals, and in innumerable mixtures. It's use as a high quality hay is the subject of this fact sheet.

RRCG is widely adapted to the 25 most southeast states from Nebraska east and south to the coasts. It is perhaps best adapted from Kansas east and south to the coasts. Of course, within these areas it should be planted on the proper soils, etc.

RRCG hay, well managed, is **very palatable** and of **high forage quality**. Feeding trials we did at Noble Foundation years ago showed cattle preferred crabgrass hay over good bermudagrass and good Old World bluestem in every trial. RRCG is a soft stem and fine stem hay and livestock readily “eat it all”. There is essentially no waste when feeding RRCG in hay feeders. Grazing trials of 13 different grasses showed crabgrass was first choice in all cases except fall maturity stages. Good, lush RRCG hay well fertilized usually averages 65% to 75% digestibility regardless of time of season. RRCG fertilized with about 75 pounds of actual nitrogen will usually be about 10% to 12% CP when properly harvested. Because RRCG is very palatable and high quality for a summer grass, the hay is often used for special purposes.

Good RRCG hay is relished by all classes of cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and exotics. Due to its good quality characteristics, it is often used exclusively for special livestock groups such as weaning calves, stocker calves, first calf heifers, horses, and any livestock needing favored with high quality hay. It is also used for brood cows, but frankly, it is more quality than they need. It is superb hay for incoming stocker cattle during the preconditioning phase in the receiving lots. It is superb hay to feed to stocker cattle on winter pastures. If a snow storm hits, cattle can continue to grow at a slower pace on free-choice RRCG hay until the snow is gone.

For hay yields to be good there must be a good stand from either new plantings or managed volunteer. Good production includes managing for good stands, good nitrogen fertilization (and lime, phosphorus, and potassium as needed) , and weed control if needed. A good stand of RRCG is often sufficient for weed control without herbicide spraying. If two or more hay cuttings are made during the season, nitrogen should be top-dressed at first tillered stand and for each crop soon after each cutting. In areas of about 25 to 30 inches of annual precipitation, about 50 to 75 pounds of actual nitrogen should be used about twice each season for upper level yields. In higher rainfall areas of 30 to 35 inches or more annual precipitation, 75 to 100 pounds of actual nitrogen should be used about twice per season. In the southeast US it is possible to do three or more topdressings a season for top level yields. These examples are for good growing seasons within those areas. Use common sense—if it is dry, more fertilization may not be wise.

RRCG is a lush hay crop if growing conditions are good. This means it will need to be dried longer(3 to 5 days of sunny/breezy weather) between cutting and baling than lower quality less lush hay crops. A good procedure in the drier regions is to mow to make a wide swath to better aerate the swath. Harvest the hay when it is knee high or taller and with seed heads that will shatter some seed for volunteer. Lay the swaths or raked windrows sideways to the prevailing winds to aid in drying. Cut at about 3 to 4 inches tall to **leave some lower green leaves** for stand survival and faster re-growth. At the last cutting for a season, cut it as short as possible “to get it all”. In more humid regions, mow the crop to leave a flat mown crop, or a wide swathed windrow. Ted the hay a day or two later, then rake and bale as it gets dry. Some producers in the humid areas make baleage from crabgrass to better deal with the humid conditions. RRCG makes good small square bales or larger round bales. Round bales store outside very well, but inside storage is always good if it is available. Repeat--To assure volunteer stands, always harvest hay when there is some seed shatter. In Oklahoma, one crop of RRCG hay is often made after wheat graze-out or grain harvest. Two to three crops can be made from single crop stands in good seasons if production management is good. We have heard of three to five cuttings in a season in the longer summer and moist southeast US. Remember—**RRCG is a premium hay that should be for livestock that can benefit from the quality.**

Other Fact Sheets are available on request, or go to our web site (address at top of page 1) : Fact sheet 1994-1997- **Establishment**; Fact sheet 1998-**Double Cropping**; Fact Sheet 1999, **Managing For Volunteer Stands**; Fact Sheet 2000, **Using Nurse Crops And Companion Forages To Establish Crabgrass Stands**; Fact Sheet 2001, **Crabgrass And Legume Mixtures**; Fact Sheet 2002, **Tillage/Renovation For Red River Crabgrass**; Fact Sheet 2003, **Applying Rotational Grazing To Red River Crabgrass**, Fact Sheet 2004, **Using Red River Crabgrass Stubble As A No-Till Planting Base For Winter Small Grains Crops, Barnyardgrass Management , and Germination Fact Sheet.**