

Elstel Farm and Seeds

“ The Crabgrass Seed Folks ”

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Fact Sheet 2010 : Experiences With ‘Quick-N-Big®’ and ‘Red River’ Crabgrass Varieties as a Forage

There are many reasons why graziers use crabgrass as a forage. The main one is because it is high palatability and high quality grazing or hay in the summer season. There are other good reasons, but the focus now is quality. A high quality “total pasture” is one of relatively high palatability, high nutrient content, **plus a pasture relatively thick and of the proper height for good animal gains.** We need all of these components for a **“high quality pasture”**.

Experience from our research days illustrates that **usual good to excellent** crabgrass pasture produces 1.4 to over 2.1 lbs ADG from stocker cattle, with an overall 1.8 ADG on good to excellent pasture. The best gains on the best of the good pasture ranged from 1.9 to 2.9 lbs ADG. 2.9 pounds ADG is the highest we recorded. Our clients report ADG from good to excellent pasture of up to 2.25 to over 2.5 lbs ADG.

Our own stocker cattle last summer (2009) averaged 1.74 ADG from buy weight to sell weight, with 53% of the summer grazing time on good crabgrass and the rest of the time on true native prairie , bermudagrass, and Plain Bluestem in rotation. These gains are excellent for the summer season. Crabgrass is also good pasture for cows, horses, and many other livestock groups including grazing swine, poultry, and exotics.

Grass fed beef and other grass fed meat products are steadily gaining in popularity with the knowledgeable consumer. There are two main reasons: a healthier product and a meat taste. The high gain potential from good crabgrass forage plays a part in that. We have produced several of our own grass fed beef over the years, but we do not sell to the public. Several of our beefs were “finished “ on mostly crabgrass that was in a bermudagrass mixture. We noted the nice mild meat flavor, but it was only the last few years when other grass fed beef producers also independently reported they observed a better meat flavor from crabgrass pasture than other summer forages. One producer and grass-fed beef supplier told us that they process **only beefs coming off crabgrass pasture** for their own consumption , and because of the better flavor. Presented as ” food for thought” , and a suggestion that if you produce grass fed beef, maybe you can consider using more of our variety crabgrasses for pastures in your summer forage program.

Part of the interest in “ grass fed” is the health aspect of it. The writings of Alan Newport are worthy of study. On the web, go to: <http://magissues.farmprogress.com> , click on “The Farmer Stockman”, click on “Search Issue” under the October 2009 issue, fill in the blank box with “Alan Newport” and search . That gets you to the articles. He also mentions a book “Good Calories, Bad Calories “ by Gary Taubes, which explains much of the health benefits of beef and apparently more correctly reports on beef health issues. The book should be available from your public library or book store. In a fashion, all of this ties back to producing good and better flavored beef from good crabgrass pastures in the summer time.

Mixtures of Quick-N-Big (QNB) and Red River Crabgrass (RR) are of interest to many clients. During 2009, we had this mixture on our farm. QNB came on earlier, just like we expected, and at first grazing it was 6 to 10 inches tall and far taller than RR. After that grazing, RR came on and both were in the mix as grazing forage the rest of the summer. As we neared summer's end and the grasses were being well used, it was difficult to tell them apart. However, it was evident at first grazing that QNB made the vast amount of early grazing period. That is one of its obvious characteristics.

Quick-N-Big and Red River crabgrass work well as a component in a conservation grass seed mixture. These situations are heavily worked and used areas such as, pond dikes, diversion terraces, roadsides, other erosion control structures, etc. We have done this successfully many times over the years, and it has always worked to date. In general, it functions as follows. These are warm season grass plantings. They are planted in spring, summer, or winter. The winter planting does not emerge until the warm, moist days of the next spring and summer. Our mixtures vary, but in general they include seeds of a native range grass mixture, Old World Bluestem, Wrangler seeded bermudagrass, and Quick-N-Big or Red River crabgrass. If the mixture is planted in the fall or winter, wheat at a heavy planting rate is used for winter soil cover. It dies in spring, or is eaten by cattle, and the other grasses emerge and increase. **Crabgrass emerges first and helps covers soil the first year**, then the Old World bluestem and the bermudagrass emerge, then increase mostly during the second and later years. The native range grasses are usually the last to establish. On very critical areas, we hand plant bermudagrass sprigs (rhizomes) for quicker and more certain bermudagrass stands. The seeds of the seed mixture are mixed with dry fertilizer and broadcast planted on as good a "seedbed" as possible for the area. **During the first year, crabgrass quickly controls the soil.** By the second year and beyond, the perennial grasses begin to dominate and do their job. I prefer the Quick-N-Big crabgrass in this mixture as it establishes quicker and it can be a bit more open structure and that allows the perennial grasses a better chance for early development. This technique can be adapted anywhere crabgrass grows, by using the perennial grasses in the mixture for that area, but with crabgrass as a serious component of the mix. **These mixtures should be utilized. If the crabgrass gets tall enough to graze or hay, then do it, But, also give the area a recovery period to continue to develop.**

Be sure of what you buy, when you buy variety crabgrasses. A kind fellow contacted us in late 2009. He purchased some Red River crabgrass seed from us in the spring, planted it, but ran out a few acres before he had the field covered. He called around in his region, and located a commercial seed store dealer who claimed to have Red River Crabgrass seed. The farmer bought some, and used it to finish planting his field the same day. The field produced crabgrass pasture. But, he reported ---the crabgrass pasture from the store bought seed was always shorter, heavily infested with leaf diseases, brownish colored, and just not nearly as good pasture as the grass from our Red River Crabgrass seed. Indications are that it was not true to variety stated. We have heard several versions of this kind of story over the years.

A fellow from Oklahoma called me several years ago and told me "Mr. X", a farmer he knew, plowed up a common crabgrass stand, planted Red River crabgrass seed, the field grew crabgrass, made a seed crop, he harvested it, and sold it as Red River Crabgrass. **Ain't no way** that was pure Red River crabgrass.

Folks, there is no way we can prevent this type of thing. But, if your source is not us, you can ask your source questions—Where did you get this seed?? Is it Certified seed? Is it pure to variety?? You get the picture! **Be sure of what you buy.**

These stories above, and others similar to them, are at least one big reason we dedicate so much effort to growing **Pedigreed, Certified Class Seed of both Quick-N-Big and Red River crabgrass as much as we can.** We simply want our seed to be pure to variety type and true to name. We can help.

We also have numerous free Management Fact Sheets available on request. Also visit our web site: www.redrivercrabgrass.com and that of the Noble Foundation : www.noble.org for more information about crabgrass forages. On the Noble site, click on: "Agriculture Programs", "Publications", "Agriculture Publications", scan for and click on titles with the word "Crabgrass". (2-2-11)

