

Salvaging a drought-affected cereal crop as greenfeed may seem like a logical action, given the current moisture, temperature and forage availability situation. The decision to proceed is pressed by the need for timeliness, balancing off potential future yield as a cereal crop vs. need for feed for the winter vs. deterioration of the crop due to stress.

The issue of “when to cut” was brought into focus by comments from Ross Hutchison (Head, Forage & Horse Branch) and Arvid Aasen (Pasture Agronomist, Western Forage/Beef Group). They noted that “When a cereal crop is under stress from drought it tends to progressively die back. If a crop to be used for greenfeed is starting to lose leaves and the stem is beginning to yellow, the chance of additional yield from this crop is nil. This is the time to inform your insurance agent of your plan, leave check strips and harvest as soon as possible.”

In terms of upside yield potential, they indicated that “For the plant that is green from the base to the head, there is the chance for increased yield from existing or future moisture; so to wait could provide more yield. The main point is to evaluate your fields daily and act quickly because under hot dry conditions the crop will deteriorate very fast.”

Ross and Arvid closed their comments with “Subsequent to harvest, send a feed sample in and test for nitrates and feed quality so you can make optimum use of your feed supply and reduce the risk of nitrate poisoning.”

Insight into how to budget out the pro’s and con’s of harvesting a standing cereal as greenfeed are provided in Ted Darling’s article, “Acquiring Standing Cereals as Greenfeed” on the Ropin’ the Web – Drought Options site ([1](#)).

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If you have questions or require further assistance on this topic, please call the AgInfo-Center at 1-866-882-7677
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