

Forage Extension Program

Hay Barley: Clean-up Your Hay Fields

By Dennis Cash, MSU Extension Service 994-5688, dcash@montana.edu

Montana ranchers have really taken hold of barley and other cereals for hay crops. Since 2000, there have been over 300,000 acres of these crops, worth about \$2.7 million, annually. Cereal forages provide good hay yields and are nutritious if harvested at the correct stage.

A major issue for most ranchers to consider is the costs associated with an annual or emergency forage, especially done every year. We recommend that the major use of these crops is as a rotation option for one or two years between stands of alfalfa or a perennial legume-grass pasture. Growing cereals allows a producer to eliminate weeds and disease problems in alfalfa ground. If hay barley or another cereal is used for annual hay, we strongly advise you to use good weed control methods pre-crop, in-crop and after harvest, so that alfalfa can be re-established onto clean ground. On irrigated ground, dandelion and quackgrass are readily controlled by crop rotation to cereals, under good weed control.

Good weed control ahead of alfalfa will include both timely tillage and herbicide applications. Many excellent herbicides are available for cereal crops, and most can be used when cereals are cut for hay. However, a number of EPA restrictions exist when herbicides are applied to cereal forages (not necessarily due to mammalian toxicity, but a lack of data). For example, some products (Ally, Amber and Puma) have no restrictions for grazing or haying, but many do not allow hay to be harvested following treatment (Assert, Express, Harmony Extra and others). Several products require seven to 60 days prior to hay harvest. Be sure to follow label restrictions, and if you need assistance use a professional applicator service.

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