



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/agriculture-benefits-of-winter-wheat>

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K-State researcher touts benefits of winter wheat in crop rotation

Lollato says crop's value extends beyond grain

By Jacob Klaudt, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Kansas State University wheat specialist Romulo Lollato says farmers should consider what they might be missing when choosing to leave winter wheat out of their usual crop rotations.

Lollato notes that wheat acres in Kansas have been decreasing at a rate of approximately 2% every year since 2005. Nationally, that decline remains at about 1.5%. Often, he said, management decisions are based solely on the crop's profitability.

However, sidelining this crop may result in growers passing over the benefits of winter wheat in multiple areas of agricultural production, such as planting, fertilizing and grazing.

According to Lollato, producers can obtain more flexibility in cropping systems when planting winter wheat. Specifically, winter wheat has a broader planting window when compared to summer crops.

“In regions where the winter is a little warmer, there is more time to plant the wheat crop and still reach your maximum yield potential for that area,” he said. “Some of our research (at K-State) shows that you have as much as 50–60 days to reach that yield potential in south-central Kansas.”

Beyond planting, growers have more freedom when fertilizing fields. Plants use most of the nitrogen available for growth in the spring, so Lollato said producers have an approximate six-month window after planting in September to put out fertilizer without losing efficacy.

“Timing is important,” he said. “The closer you administer nitrogen to the stem elongation phase is typically better regarding the nitrogen’s effectiveness.”

He added: “A large fertilizer window allows producers to match up applications with optimum weather and it ensures the nitrogen has time to get incorporated into the root zone and reduce losses.”

Additionally, diversified producers raising livestock benefit from planting winter wheat for grazing.

“Growing this dual-purpose crop provides quite a bit of high-quality forage during a time of the year when others are less available – like late fall, winter and early spring,” Lollato said.

While the price of the actual grain can be less than ideal some years, incorporating winter wheat into crop rotations allows for double-cropping or growing two or more crops in the same field simultaneously, which opens up other economic possibilities.

“In many operations, if we're dealing with summer crops, we can grow just one crop each year,” Lollato said. “If we introduce a winter wheat crop in that system, we can grow three crops in two years, depending on where we are.”

“The possibility of intensifying the system like that and being able to produce – on average – more than one cash crop annually plays a huge role in profitability.”

Other advantages of having winter wheat in crop rotations:

- Weed suppression.
- Moisture conservation.
- Carbon sequestration.

To help communicate the positives of winter wheat, Lollato and the vice president of research and operations at Kansas Wheat, Aaron Harries, have launched an information campaign called “Wheat: Beyond the Value of the Grain.” More information about this movement is [available online](#).

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

Kansas Wheat launches campaign conveying the benefits of wheat beyond the value of grain, <https://kswheat.com/beyond-the-value-of-the-grain>

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