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Brassicas may extend the grazing season for beef and dairy cattle and reduce feed costs in temperate production systems

A new original research article in *Applied Animal Science* examines annual forage brassicas as high-quality, low-cost feed alternatives for cattle in temperate climate production systems.

Philadelphia, PA, April 6, 2020—Dairy and beef producers in temperate regions are interested in forages that extend the grazing season and reduce feed costs. Annual forage brassicas might do just that, but research on the yield and quality of these crops was lacking. Scientists from the USDA Agricultural Research Service teamed up to investigate the quality of these alternative feeds for cattle.

In temperate environments, annual ryegrass has traditionally been used to fill the gap in year-round production needs that is present when using cool-season forages such as orchardgrass and tall fescue. Cattle producers traditionally must either feed conserved forages or stockpile perennial forages during fall and winter. However, annual ryegrass has its limitations, and alternative crops, such as annual brassicas, might be a better option.

The research compared ryegrass [KB Supreme annual ryegrass (*Lolium multiflorum* Lam.)] with three forage brassicas: Barsica forage rape (*Brassica napus* L.), Inspiration canola (*Brassica napus* L.), and Appin turnip (*Brassica rapa* L.). “Compared with traditional perennial forages, canola, forage rape, and turnip provide improved dry matter yield potential and digestibility, and greater net energy and nutrient yields that are very attractive,” said Dr. David K. Beede, editor-in-chief of *Applied Animal Science*. Author Dr. Kathy J. Soder added, “In general, the nutrient yields of the brassicas would allow for about twice the carrying capacity of ryegrass.”

Brassica species and ryegrass do have varying concentrations of crude protein and minerals. Soder warned that “grazing-based operations also should consider the risks associated with feeding these forages.” Crude protein levels often are in excess of animals’ dietary needs. The risks can be managed effectively with proper stocking rates and carefully balanced diets. If used with care, brassicas can provide twice as many grazing days as ryegrass during fall and winter when high-quality forage is in short supply, reducing feed costs for dairy and beef producers.

The article appears in the April issue of *Applied Animal Science*.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

“Assessment of forage brassica species for dairy and beef-cattle fall grazing systems,” by S. Leanne Dillard, Eric D. Billman, and Kathy J. Soder (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15232/aas.2019-01921>), *Applied Animal Science*, Volume 36, Issue 2 (April 2020), published by FASS Inc. and Elsevier Inc.

Full text of the article is available to credentialed journalists upon request; contact Brittany Morstatter at +1-217-356-3182 ext. 143 or arpas@assoqh.org to obtain copies. To schedule an interview with the authors, please contact Dr. Kathy Soder at Kathy.soder@usda.gov.

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