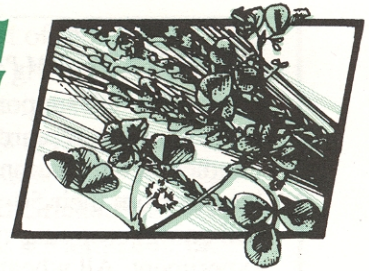


SUSTAINABLE FARMING

Quarterly



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Alfalfa tops annual legumes for building soil

— By David Granatstein, coordinator of the Washington State University Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources in Wenatchee —

Alfalfa is often called the “queen” of forages. But, based on the experiences of Montana grain farmer Bob Quinn, it may also deserve the title of king of the green manures.

Over the past decade, Quinn, who farms several thousand acres near Big Sandy, has experimented with various crop rotations that include green manures, with several goals in mind: to reduce the use of summer fallow, grow his own nitrogen, improve his soils, increase income, and maintain high protein levels in his organically grown wheat.



Bob Quinn

Quinn is research-oriented by nature. He earned a Ph.D. in plant biochemistry prior to returning to the farm in 1978. He has approached the green manure question in his own fashion, using consistent observation, careful record keeping, and a few quantitative measurements over a long period of time. While this approach can't be evaluated statistically, Quinn believes the data he has collected is worth sharing with other growers.

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His testing began in 1983 when he started a comparison of two adjacent fields, which had been managed similarly in past years. That year, he began using management that met the Montana organic certification requirements on one field, while continuing his typical conventional management on the other (see Table 1 on page 5). Quinn monitored grain yields, grain protein, and soil nitrate for the next six years in his effort to determine whether the alfalfa green manure could supply adequate nitrogen for his grain, and for how many grain crops after the green manure was incorporated.

In the fall of 1986, both fields were planted to winter wheat after

MORE QUINN, PAGE 5

Looking back, moving ahead: the SFQ says its goodbyes

— By David Granatstein —

In this final issue of the SFQ, I would like to reflect for a moment on the six years that have passed since the newsletter started. In 1988, the USDA initiated the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant program (SARE, formerly LISA). The Northwest dryland cereal-legume project, which started the SFQ, was one of the original projects funded. The project cooperators from across the region sought to better understand the concept of sustainability in the dryland cropping system that covers so many

acres in our six states.

Of course, the term “sustainability” and its implications has been widely discussed. Certain growers and researchers viewed it as an indictment of their past. Others saw it in strictly economic terms. And some used it as an opportunity to imagine significant change on the farm.

Regardless of one's viewpoint (and the debate goes on today), a number of noteworthy positive changes have occurred over the past

MORE GOODBYES, PAGE 2

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