



Feed Shortage 2018

Regrowth brassicas

Summer cropping options

Regrowth brassicas are forage crops of the brassica species that have the ability to regrow after grazing. They include species such as forage rape (*Brassica napus*), kale (*Brassica oleracea*), hybrids such as pasja (*Brassica campestris* x *Brassica napus*) and leafy turnips.

Regrowth brassicas can be sown as an alternative to turnips during summer but also as an autumn forage option.

Regrowth brassicas differ from turnip brassicas as they will regrow after grazing. They provide feed for longer than turnips due to their regrowth ability. However, this also means that paddocks are not ready for resowing as early as if turnips were the summer crop option.

Performance

Regrowth brassicas have higher autumn growth potential than most perennial or annual pasture species and other forage crops. The nutritional value of regrowth brassicas is similar to turnips. They provide high energy and crude protein at a time of the year when protein is limited.

Agronomy

Most regrowth brassica seeds grow quickly and will emerge from the ground in 7–10 days from either spring

or autumn sowings. Brassica seeds are very small so it is important to sow them at a depth of 15mm or less for a quick and successful emergence. Broadcasting the seed followed by rolling has shown good results unless the soil is too wet for rolling.

Typically, broad-leaved weeds in brassica crops are difficult to manage. To minimise competition during establishment, it is best to sow the brassica into a clean paddock—either fully cultivated or sprayed. When brassicas are sown in the spring, weeds such as fat hen can be very competitive during the germination phase. Consider using a pre-emergent herbicide before sowing where broadleaf weeds or annual grasses are an issue. Talk to your local agronomist about the variety and management that best suits your system.

Regrowth brassicas will generally require phosphorus and nitrogen at sowing. Brassicas are sensitive to low molybdenum and boron, so where

Key messages

- Regrowth brassicas fill a feed gap during the summer and autumn
- Provide high quality feed – energy and protein to the herd
- Can be grazed more than once
- Should be introduced to the herd slowly

these trace elements are known to be deficient, either sow seed with these in the coating or apply them in the fertiliser application. Talk to your agronomist for the best options for your system.

During spring, N mineralisation will occur with the cultivation of the seed bed potentially reducing the amount of nitrogen required. Nitrogen mineralisation is driven by temperature but will depend on paddock history and moisture availability through the summer.

Potassium may also be required if soil potassium levels are limiting, but should be applied as a topdressing.

Grazing management

Managing the grazing of regrowth brassicas is important to reach potential yields. Regrowth brassicas can be grazed as quickly as 6–8 weeks for some varieties. Grazing management will vary for different brassica varieties, but generally, when the crop reaches 30–40cm, or about 10 leaves, it can be grazed. Regrowth will be best if the crop is grazed to 5–10cm. If grazed too low, regrowth will be slower. Strip grazing will allow crops to be utilised most effectively.

To achieve high utilisation and avoid health disorders, careful grazing management and allocation is required. Stock should be given access slowly (1–2 hours initially) and build up to maximum allowance over at least a week. Avoid introducing hungry animals onto the crop. A maximum daily intake of 5–6kg DM/head is suggested to avoid animals health problems.

Check with your local agronomist or nutritionist regarding introducing brassicas to the herd to ensure best practice is followed.

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Dairy Australia Limited ABN 60 105 227 987
T + 61 3 9694 3777 F + 61 3 9694 3701
E enquiries@dairyaustralia.com.au
dairyaustralia.com.au

