

Forage Brassicas – An Introduction

Introduction

Forage brassica crops are a very useful component of a forage feed programme on farms. Brassicas provide a source of high quality feed (MJME/kgDM typically 11-14) and can be especially useful as this feed can be available when feed demand exceeds pasture supply. Common uses of brassicas are as a source of feed during the winter period, as a finishing feed for lambs particularly and as a feed source during periods of soil moisture deficit.

Brassica crops are typically easy to manage, high yielding and can be used as part of a pasture renovation programme. Brassicas do have some limitations as a feed source due primarily to the chemical composition of most species. Properly managed brassicas provide an excellent feed source in pastoral systems.

Types of Forage brassica

Forage brassicas include the following:

- Forage rape (*Brassica napus*)
- Leafy turnips or forage brassica hybrids (*Brassica campestris* spp.)
- Kale (*Brassica oleracea*).
- Turnips (*Brassica rapa*)
- Swedes (*Brassica napobrassica*)



Coleor Kale

Brassica Options

The choice of forage crops which can be grown on a particular site is numerous and determining which is most appropriate depends on many factors including:

- Paddock factors (Soil type, fertility, drainage and crop history)
- Intended use (End use of crop, desired number of grazings and method of utilisation)
- Timing (Time of year for sowing and intended time of consumption)
- Class of stock (is the crop intended to boost growth rates of young stock or simply supply maintenance feed to older stock).

Other issues which should influence type and cultivar selection are issues of pest and disease pressure as some varieties are far more resistant to some pests and diseases than others.

Animal Health Issues

Brassicas are a very good stock feed source but do have a few limitations. Animals should always be gradually introduced to a brassica crop as a feed source to allow for the adjustments the gastrointestinal tract must make to utilise it. Not doing so can lower stock performance and in severe cases harm or kill stock.

The major possible animal health issues associated with grazing brassicas include:

- Nitrate Poisoning
- Photosensitisation
- Kale Anaemia (red water)
- Goitrogenic substances
- Digestive Disturbances
- SMCO's (S-methyl cysteine sulphoxide)

Summary

Forage brassicas are a very useful tool for pastoral farmers. Brassicas can be used to provide a high value feed at times when pasture supply can be limiting. With proper management brassicas can be a very high yielding, crop and an excellent option for farmers.

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