

Producer Profile

Ed Janzen - Pincher Creek, Alberta

Ed Janzen's father grew winter wheat and Ed has carried on the tradition for almost every one of the forty years he and his wife, Leona, have been farming. Winter wheat is an important tool in the Janzens' toolbox. Once the winter wheat is in, it's one piece of land Ed and Leona don't have to worry about. They can concentrate on seeding the rest of the land in the spring.

Timing is everything

"You've got to have all your ducks in a row for winter wheat," Janzen says. "You need to get the seeder ready in the summer. The seeding window is pretty narrow, there's no room for last minute planning."

At his location southeast of Pincher Creek, Janzen has found the second and third weeks of September are ideal for seeding winter wheat. "If you seed later, so you have one or two leaves in the fall, you don't get a good enough root system established," he says. "You could end up with a poor stand the next year. And, if you have too big a plant, it doesn't survive the winter as well. I like to see four or five leaves at freeze-up."

Direct Seeding Advantages

Shallow seed placement at an inch or less from the soil surface makes a big difference to winter wheat. Janzen likes his Conserva-Pak drill for its accurate seed placement. "I can put that seed exactly where I want it in just about any soil conditions." Janzen adds that winter wheat doesn't like to be deep, even in a dry year. "It just needs a little dirt on top of it and a little rain."

Janzen has been a zero tiller for about 5 years, and he's found it a perfect partner to winter wheat. Ed finds zero till to be like crop insurance for winter wheat because it protects the crop from wind and water erosion. Zero till also reduces soil disturbance and allows them to put the crop in and fertilize in one pass.

Weather Challenges

At over 3700 feet elevation, south-east of Pincher Creek, Janzen's area has a long tradition of growing winter wheat, but the weather is a constant challenge. "Almost every year, we break a weather record for something," says Janzen. "Our rotations are almost totally regulated by the weather and we're always hard-pressed to get seed in the ground." This is the key reason for Janzen keeping winter wheat in his rotation for all these years. It provides stress relief in the spring to have some land already seeded. "The weather seems to throw a curve at us every year," Ed says. "And, it's the only crop we've ever been able to combine in August."

Diversification is key

Although barley is still the main crop in Janzen's area, winter wheat puts some diversity into the crop rotation. There's a steady local market for feed



Benefits of Growing Winter Cereals:

Equipment & Labour Efficiencies
By using seed drills, combines and labour outside of their traditional busy times, there is an opportunity for lower demands on equipment and operators.

Direct Seeding
Leaving your stubble helps save your soil from wind and water erosion.

Moisture Utilization
What better way to take advantage of snow-melt moisture than to have your crop already in the ground. Winter cereals begin growing very early in the spring and can use the early spring snow-melt moisture.

Earlier Cash Flows
Winter cereals are harvested earlier than other spring cereals and can therefore be marketed earlier, creating some much needed cash flow on the farm in early harvest.

grain. He also grows spring wheat. He likes to seed winter wheat after spring wheat, but he says he's had fair to average results after barley.

Fertilizer is a liquid asset

It isn't easy to get winter wheat in when there's swathing and combining to be done, but Ed and Leona have the logistics figured out for their operation. "We fit it in on a wet day, or Ed seeds and I combine," says Leona. "That's when we appreciate the convenience of liquid fertilizer. I don't have to run to town with the truck to pick up fertilizer," she says. "We can store liquid fertilizer on the farm easily and safely," adds Ed. "It's easy to move and you can pump as many times as you want, it doesn't deteriorate. Our first Conserva-Pak had a liquid system. Our new machine can use liquid or dry, so we can buy whichever is the best buy. Liquid is a very user-friendly product, especially for smaller operators like us. And, you put it in the ground where you want it and it stays there. Our yields have probably been limited in the amount of fertilizer we can put with the seed," he says. Ed usually applies 55 to 60 lbs of N and 10 lbs of P.

Weed control

Winter wheat and zero-till work together to help Janzen control weeds, especially wild oats. "We don't cheat on the pre-seeding Roundup," he says. "And we use an in-crop chemical, mainly 2,4-D." Overall, fewer chemicals are used on the winter wheat. "Wild oats don't like a canopy," he says. "The winter wheat grows early and thick, it shades those wild oats so even if they grow, they don't set seed. Quite a few years I've seen wild oats in the winter wheat, but the heads are sterile with no seed in them."

Winter Wheat Returns

Returns from winter wheat are marginal says Janzen. But, if he needs straw for his cows, he can count on a reasonable amount to bale from the winter wheat as well as some time to bale it before fall weather. Normally, Ed prefers to chop and spread his cereal straw. Building up organic matter by keeping the crop residue in the field has made a difference to his land. "Some of our land is a black gumbo," he says. "Sometimes the water has a tough time getting away on it. It's surprising how much water it held when we had 8 inches in a few days in spring 2002. The biggest thing is that our land is staying home." Winter wheat in the rotation allows Ed to profit from the straw produced, while returning residue to the land in years when it's not grown.

"I keep growing winter wheat and I believe the price will get up one of these days. The varieties available now

have the bread-making qualities the millers want," Ed says. He also likes not having all his eggs in one basket. Most of the winter wheat the Janzens produce is sold through the Wheat Board as an alternative to the local feed market.

Janzen has also found a niche market he's exploiting by cleaning his winter wheat for seed. The municipality is using winter wheat as a carrier for forage seed for roadside ditches and reclamation work. They've found it's better than rye and it's virtually weed-free so it gives the forages a good clean start.



Varieties have come a long way since Ed first started growing winter wheat. "A number of years ago, we put in test strips of quite a few varieties. We had Kestrel, Sundance, Clair and some others. Readymade stood out, so I didn't grow anything else for a long time. Now, I've moved on to Bellatrix. We harvest 35 to 40 bushels of winter wheat, 50 bushels isn't unusual and we have had 60, compared to 30 or 35 bushels of spring wheat. The real benefit is that it breaks up harvest and seeding."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Susanne Brummelhuis
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Tel: 403-362-4827
Fax: 403-362-0245
E-mail: s_brummelhuis@ducks.ca
Web site: www.ducks.ca



Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission



Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

