



# NEWSLETTER

## Driftless Ag Update

Ag news for La Crosse, Vernon, and Crawford Counties from UW-Madison Extension



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Here's your September Driftless Ag Update!

Hello and congratulations on receiving our September Driftless Ag Update! This newsletter is co-written by your local UW-Madison Extension Ag Educators, Beth McIlquham (livestock) and Sam Bibby (crops).

**Please contact your local extension office for the print version of any article included in this newsletter.**

## **Notes from your Regional Crops Educator- Sam Bibby**

-This is your reminder to scout for southern rust this year. Conditions this year have favored southern rust and in some places infections have been severe. If you are planning corn silage harvest the effect of southern rust must be considered. The disease can cause a rapid loss of plant moisture in the weeks leading up to harvest. This, if not accounted for, can lead to corn silage below ideal moisture. As we know this will cause a poor pack, spoilage, and added dry matter loss. Scout, check moisture leading up to harvest, and expect a quicker dry-down from severe infections.

-Consider being a National Weather Service Citizen Scientist! The Community Collaborative Rain, Hail, and Snow (CoCoRaHS) network is looking for additional sites for rain gauges and weather observations. There is a special promotion for \$8 off a rain gauge through Sep 10 (WISCOCO8). They specifically need additional sites in Juneau County!

## **Notes from your Regional Livestock Educator- Beth McIlquham**

-Save the Date for a Calving Workshop!: The University of Wisconsin Division of Extension is offering a Save A Calf, Save A Cow workshop series for dairy and beef producers, and dairy workers (in Spanish). This workshop provides information and techniques to boost your confidence in preparing the cow for calving, obstetric techniques and newborn calf care. There will be a Zoom session and an in-person session. The Zoom session opportunities will be on November 5 and 6. The in-person session opportunities will be on November 12 in Gays Mills and November 13 in Darlington. More information will be in next month's newsletter.

-Lambing Workshop in Menomonie: Although Menomonie is a good distance from most living in the Driftless area, I wanted to include this learning opportunity anyway. This workshop discusses biosecurity, lambing time nutrition, lamb processing and bottle lambs, recordkeeping, and more!

-Disease Digest: The UW-Madison Extension Livestock team has created a webpage that houses resources and information on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. There have been no cases of New World Screwworm in the U.S. in livestock. Theileria, a parasite carried by Asian Longhorned Ticks, was confirmed in Iowa. For animal owners of all kinds, please evaluate your biosecurity protocols, including pest management.

2025 WISCONSIN EXTENSION

# WEED MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP



**09.11.2025**  
Targeted Herbicide Application Technologies

Registration, sponsorship opportunities, and more to be announced online:  
[go.wisc.edu/ExtWeedManagementWorkshop](http://go.wisc.edu/ExtWeedManagementWorkshop)

8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. | CCA Credits Available

Arlington Ag Research Station  
N633 Hopkins Rd, Arlington, WI 53911

## Weed Management Workshop September 11<sup>th</sup>, 8:30am-4:00pm

Learn about the opportunities and challenges with camera-based targeted herbicide application technologies through presentations and equipment field demonstrations. Visit the product and education booths throughout the day provided by the workshop sponsors, participate in a weed identification contest, and enjoy morning and afternoon snacks along with a warm, catered lunch!

Register

<https://events.humanitix.com/wisconsin-extension-weed-management-workshop>



RICHLAND COUNTY

## PASTURE WALK

Join experienced graziers, Claudia & Jerry Berres, on Horse Creek Ranch to see and hear all about their custom grazing operation!

TOPICS WILL INCLUDE:

- What is "custom grazing?"
- Important infrastructure including cattle handling areas, fencing and watering system to pump water to ridge fields
- Benefits of rotational grazing w/ rainfall simulator demonstration
- NRCS Programs and other cost-share opportunities

Event Info:

**Date:** Wednesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>

**Time:** 5 pm - 7 pm

**Location:** 21602 Berres Ln. Richland Center, WI 53581

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Richland County Extension  
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection

## Pasture Walk

September 24<sup>h</sup>, 5:00-7:00pm

21602 Berres Ln., Richland Center, WI 53581

Join experienced graziers, Claudia & Jerry Berres, on Horse Creek Ranch to see and hear all about their custom grazing operation!

## Wisconsin Water and Soil Health Conference

December 16-17, 2025

Kalahari Resort & Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, WI

### Save the Date WWASH

Join us at the 2025 WWASH Conference to explore the intersection of on-farm research, soil health, and water quality. Engage with other farmers, dynamic keynote speakers, participate in interactive breakout sessions, and contribute to thought-provoking roundtable discussions, all designed to deepen your expertise and provide actionable insights for your farm or the producers you support.



### Grazing School in Lancaster

The Wisconsin Schools of Grazing offer unique, hands-on educational experiences designed to empower graziers with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage pasture-based livestock systems.

Register:

<https://grassworks.app.neoncrm.com/nx/portal/neonevents/eventspath=%2Fportal%2Fevents%2F18359>

# Badger Crop Connect

### Badger Crop Connect 2025

Badger Crop Connect is back for 2025. Every 2nd and 4th Thursday from 12:30 to 1:30 via Zoom UW faculty and other topic experts will provide timely recommendations, share research findings and provide program updates.

[https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/programs/badger-crop-connect/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=wcm\\_march\\_ii](https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/programs/badger-crop-connect/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=wcm_march_ii)



## **Winter camelina emerges as promising alternative to rye cover crop**

By now, you have likely heard how cover crops can benefit soil in ways such as minimizing erosion, increasing organic matter, reducing nutrient leaching and the list goes on. With all these benefits, cover crops seem like an easy sell. However, hesitation still exists due to challenges with incorporation in a corn-soybean system.

The climate in most Midwestern states gives farmers a short window to establish a cover crop after corn or soybeans, in addition to barriers such as seed cost, equipment and termination challenges. This leaves farmers with few options, and most opt for winter rye if they are going to plant a cover crop. Rye is a great nitrogen scavenger and can provide a weed-suppressing amount of biomass; however, as it matures in the spring, the carbon-to-nitrogen ratio of the crop increases, which means nitrogen becomes less available to that year's crop as the rye residue scavenges additional nitrogen to decompose. Corn following a rye cover can experience a yield drag due to nitrogen tie-up and seedling disease effects. This may contribute to hesitancy and slow adoption of cover crop practices. However, there may be an effective alternative to rye that is just as winter-hardy.

### **Meet winter camelina**

While not as well-known as rye, winter camelina is an extremely winter-hardy species in the Brassica family. It is often nicknamed "false flax." Typically, winter camelina is grown in regions of the Upper Midwest, Northern Great Plains and Canada as an oilseed for sustainable biofuel production. Seeds contain an average of 40% oil content. Winter camelina is used as an overwintering cover crop on its own or in mixes.

Whether for oilseed or cover crop purposes, the crop is planted between mid-September and mid-October and flowers in May. Its early flowering can be seen as attractive to pollinators. The carbon-to-nitrogen ratio of camelina is lower than rye, ranging from 10-to-1 to 20-to-1, which makes it decompose quickly and easily. One attractive attribute of winter camelina is that because it is a brassica, not a grass, it is less likely to pass on pests and diseases to a following grass crop like corn.



## 1st-year cover crop study

Rye excels at taking up nitrogen that may otherwise be lost from the soil during spring thaws and rains. To determine if winter camelina can perform as well as rye while avoiding the potential drawbacks of rye before corn, a two-year study was started in 2024 with three University of Wisconsin Extension crops and soils educators and four area farmers. Four farms — two in Dane County, one in Juneau County, and one in Vernon County — are participating.

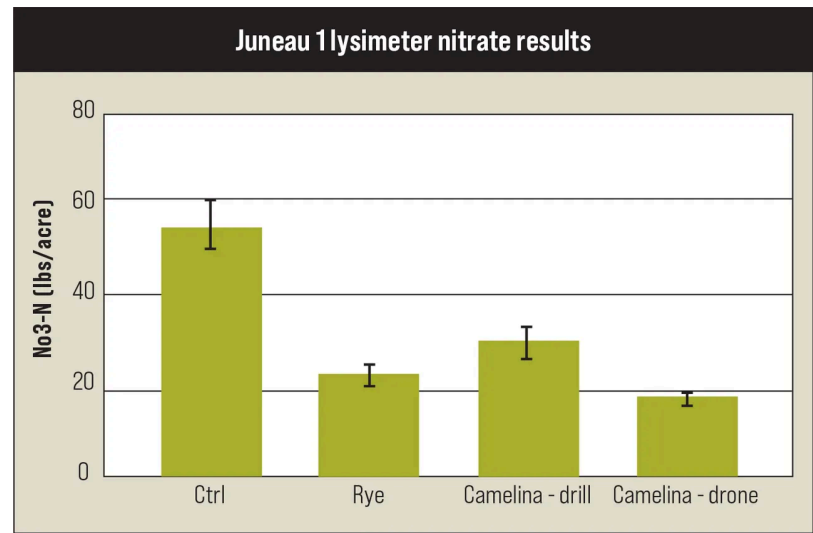
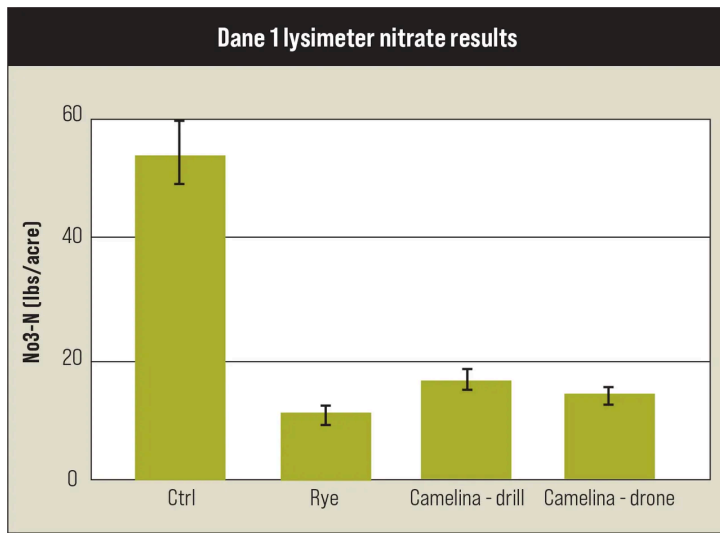
The treatments studied at each location include:

- no cover crop control
- drilled winter rye
- drilled winter camelina
- drone-seeded winter camelina

Drone-seeded winter camelina was flown into standing soybeans in the fall of 2024 at about 50% leaf drop. Drilled treatments were planted after soybean harvest. Resin lysimeters, a simple method of measuring nitrate lost below the root zone, were installed in each plot in the fall to track nitrate leaching under the cover crops, in collaboration with UW-Madison Extension specialist Steven Hall's team. In addition, soil nitrate and cover crop biomass samples were collected. Cover crops were chemically terminated in spring 2025 and lysimeters were dug up before corn was planted. This fall, corn yield measurements will be collected before the study is repeated for a second year.

Drone-seeded camelina treatments established better than drilled treatments. Although only one year of lysimeter data has been collected from this study, the ability of winter camelina to reduce nitrate leaching to groundwater was comparable to rye. A major takeaway of first-year results was that all of the cover crop treatments decreased nitrate leaching relative to the bare-soil control, sometimes by as much as 50 pounds of nitrogen per acre.

Prior to this study, corn yield was collected in a field in Dane County that compared a winter wheat cover crop to camelina. Yield of the control (no cover crop) and camelina plots were indistinguishable at 197 and 196 bushels per acre, respectively, while wheat plots showed a 147-bushel yield (about a 25% drop). The distinct difference in the carbon-to-nitrogen ratio between rye (25-to-1) and camelina (17-to-1) may explain these results, as camelina residue was more likely to decompose quickly and less likely to contribute to yield drag.



*NITRATE LEACHING: Nitrate leaching was measured by resin lysimeters installed in fall 2024 and retrieved in spring 2025. The top chart shows Dane County, Wis. The bottom chart shows Juneau County, Wis.*

## Lessons learned

Two key take-home points arose from this study:

1. Check herbicide program. Look at your herbicides to see if any products have residual effects. Winter camelina is sensitive to herbicide carryover, especially in groups 2, 5, 14, 15 and 27. Perform a bioassay to determine the effect of any herbicide carryover before planting.
2. Obtain quality seed. Assure you are using quality seed with the labeled variety Joelle. Some seed dealers carry "variety not stated," or VNS, seed that may not be the winter biotype causing the cover to winterkill. Save yourself the hassle and be sure of the seed integrity.

Researchers will continue to build on these early results, but initial findings are promising. From the first four sites and one year (four "site-years") of this study, findings include that planting a cover crop, no matter the species, can reduce nitrate leaching to groundwater. Winter camelina plots performed similarly to rye.

Drone-seeding camelina into standing soybeans worked well, given timely rains, and had a numerically greater nitrate reduction compared to drilled treatments. Residual herbicide application and seed variety played major roles in germination and overwintering success of winter camelina. If you are searching for an alternative overwintering cover crop, winter camelina might be a reliable option.

## **Biosecurity: Start with small steps**

This article was originally published in the [Wisconsin Agriculturist](#).

Animal disease outbreaks are a common sight in today's headlines. Avian influenza, African swine fever, and foot-and-mouth disease are just a few examples.

Producers can take steps to minimize the risk of a disease outbreak on their livestock premises. When beef producers increase biosecurity measures to decrease the likelihood of foreign animal diseases, they are also taking steps to reduce exposure to and disease losses from more common endemic diseases such as bovine viral diarrhea, infectious bovine rhinotracheitis, mycoplasma, Johne's disease, shipping fever, trichomoniasis, warts and ringworm.

Disease pathogens spread by various means. New animals, animals returning from livestock shows, nose-to-nose contact among cattle, and any animal that has been away from your herd can pose a biological risk by carrying pathogens and exposing herd mates. Implement 30-day isolations for new and returning animals.

Cattle can come into contact with diseases through fluids such as manure, mucus and semen. Inanimate objects such as tractors, feed wagons, trucks and shared equipment can also transmit diseases when exposed to pathogens and not properly disinfected before returning to or visiting your facility.

Visitors and farmworkers can carry diseases on their clothing, footwear and hands. Wearing clean clothing, washing and disinfecting footwear, and washing hands before visiting and arriving to work can help control the spread of disease.

With so many ways for diseases to come in contact with your cattle, implementing a few low-cost biosecurity measures can decrease the risk of transmission and allow for tracing of disease movement in the case of highly contagious animal disease outbreaks. Remember, premises ID numbers must be renewed every three years, and every location where animals are kept will need a separate premises ID number. Think of it as the location having the ID, not the cow enterprise.

Proper signage helps manage traffic and contamination risks by informing visitors, family members and employees of biosecurity requirements. Post biosecurity signs in key locations such as main entries, building and facility entries, farm perimeters, employee work areas, animal feed and water stations, and anywhere equipment contacts animals. The Center for Food Security and Public Health has signage to download and print.

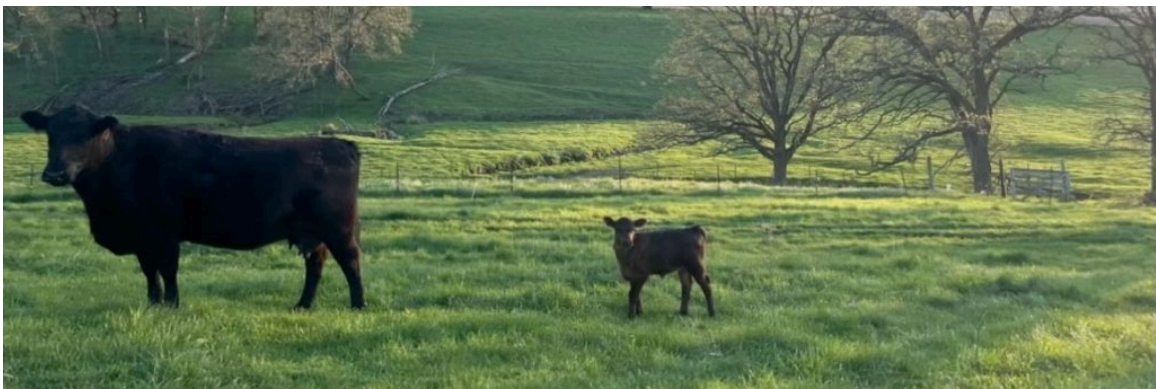


## **Focus on footwear**

Footwear can carry disease pathogens to your farm when worn in contaminated areas. Decrease the risk of contamination by either having designated “on-farm” and “off-farm” footwear, requiring visitors to wash and disinfect footwear upon arriving and leaving facilities, or providing shoe covers or disinfectants that stay on the farm. Limiting where visitors are allowed reduces the risk of disease introduction.

Keep track of animals, people and equipment movement with movement logs. Movement logs will help facilitate tracking the source of disease and how it could move to infect other herds. During a foreign animal disease outbreak, tracking disease locations and animal movement will be necessary for future animal movements.

Beef producers can start protecting their cattle and their livelihood against common diseases and a foreign animal disease outbreak by implementing a few minor changes in farm protocols. Keep premises ID numbers current; stop the spread of disease with proper cleaning and disinfecting; notify visitors, family members and workers of biosecurity protocols; and record the comings and goings of people, animals and equipment. Take the small steps now to ensure proper biosecurity.



## **Choose a Weaning Method to Decrease Stress on Calves**

It's no secret that weaning is arguably the most stressful time in a beef calves' life. Calves build strong maternal bonds with their mothers over the 6+ months they are tagging along until they are weaned. Weaning can be done a variety of ways, but the ultimate goal is to minimize stress to set them up for success in their next stage in life.

## **Decrease the Stress Before Weaning by Providing Opportunities:**

Decreasing separation stress should start in the pasture. When calves are weaned from their mother, it helps if they know how to eat out of a bunk or feeder. Calves start to find some food for themselves a few weeks after birth. Research has suggested by 3 months of age; calves are likely eating 1.1-1.5% of their body weight in forage in addition to nursing the cow. Cows can only provide around half the daily nutrients the calf requires at around 3 to 4 months of age (depending on pasture quality/quantity), the remainder is obtained through what the calf naturally learns to eat, in most cases pasture, as it gets older.

Learning to eat from a bunk prior to weaning can be accomplished a few different ways. Short duration, (about 3 weeks) creep feeding right before weaning can help calves learn to eat from a bunk. To minimize digestive upsets and ensure a smoother transition at weaning, consider a diet that's palatable, higher in digestible fiber, and most similar to the diet calves will receive post-weaning. It can be as simple as corral panels, with a creep gate and a bunk with daily feeding to help manage intake and increase calves' familiarity with people. Another option is to let the cows teach them by providing some feed in bunks for a short time prior to weaning. Plenty of bunk space, so all cattle can get to the bunk is needed for this to work successfully. Plan ahead to avoid administering other stressful management practices (i.e. castration, dehorning, and vaccination) far enough away from weaning to avoid compounding stress.

## **Decrease the Stress Before Weaning by Providing Opportunities:**

Fenceline weaning is a lower-stress method of weaning calves from cows. When compared to abrupt weaning with total separation of cow and calf, fenceline weaning calves has shown to reduce stress as measured by calf behavior and gain after weaning. Fenceline weaning involves separating cows and calves into two different pastures where they can still hear, see, and smell each other. Ideally cow/calf pairs are initially put in the pasture where the calves will remain at separation, so the calves are familiar with water and food sources after separation. Fences must be in excellent condition to keep cows and calves separated. Forage and feed availability should be similar to pre-weaning to maintain feed intakes and reduce stress.

Two-step or two-stage weaning is another option for producers to decrease stress for cows and calves during the weaning process. It requires handling calves twice to insert nose flaps and remove them 4-7 days later. This first stage allows the cows and calves to be together but prohibits the calf to suckle milk from its mother. Stage two begins another 4-7 days later when calves are removed from their mother completely. Two-step weaning breaks the weaning cycle into two separate, less stressful 4–7 day periods for the cow and calf. Considerations for producers interested in practicing two-step weaning include the incurred costs of purchasing weaning flaps and the extra time and labor associated with inserting and removing the flaps during the two-step weaning process.

### **Conclusion:**

Weaning stress should not be overlooked. Proper management before, during, and after weaning will have an effect on the health and performance of your calf crop and your herd in the long run. Now is the time to think about your weaning strategies so calves aren't weaned on diesel fumes on their way down the road.

### **Managing Silage Corn Diseases and Mycotoxins at Chopping Time**

We are quickly approaching that time of year where we will see silage choppers working the 2025 corn crop. This means it is time to understand overall crop health and how diseases might be affecting the crop so that you can make the best silage product you can.

Foliar diseases such as southern rust, tar spot, gray leaf spot (GLS), and northern corn leaf blight (NCLB) are all VERY visible in corn fields in Wisconsin this year and can be problematic for silage production. Not only do these diseases lead to a reduction in overall silage quality, but they can also force the plant to scavenge carbohydrates in the stalk which can result in standability issues and lodging. These diseases can also influence whole plant moisture, making harvesting at optimal moisture difficult. If silage is harvested at sub-optimal moisture, then packing the bunker properly can be a challenge which can lead to slow fermentation and continued growth of aerobic organisms like fungi. This can indirectly lead to an increase in mycotoxins and “mold” issues from these aerobic fungi.



## Tar spot and silage harvest

Tar spot of corn has been an issue on silage corn in Wisconsin since 2016. In fact, the first finding of tar spot was on corn for silage that year. Since 2016 the largest and most consistent impacts happen on corn for silage vs. corn for grain. Yes, tar spot can result in significant grain losses, but tar spot can also affect the overall plant in other ways such as loss in dry-matter yield (Fig. 1) and whole plant moisture contents well below optimal, making bunker-packing a significant issue. In recent work in Wisconsin, we see significant dry matter yield reductions when tar spot severity on the ear leaf reaches over 10% at the time of chopping. This can result in as much as 15% reduction in yield, with these impacts dramatically increasing at severity levels of 20% or more on the ear leaf (Fig. 1).

Southern rust has been another important foliar disease of corn this season. Southern rust and tar spot function similarly on the plant. Thus, if any foliar disease is moving quickly in your silage crop, you might consider chopping a bit earlier to reduce dry matter yield losses and to try to optimize whole plant moisture, prioritizing good bunker management. If moisture at chopping is not prioritized, then subsequent storage issues such as mold and mycotoxin concerns can arise indirectly, due to poor bunker management. This brings us to Gibberella ear and stalk rot in silage corn.

Gibberella ear rot is caused by *Fusarium graminearum* (a.k.a. *Gibberella zeae*). The same pathogen can cause Gibberella crown and stalk rot in corn. We have observed both diseases on silage corn in Wisconsin in recent years. Our environment here in the Great Lakes region makes a perfect place for this pathogen to cause these diseases. In addition to the damage that the pathogen can cause, the fungus can also produce various mycotoxins, most importantly deoxynivalenol (DON or Vomitoxin). Our laboratory has conducted quite a bit of research recently trying to understand where in the plant DON accumulates. In detached plant part experiments, we have noted that DON can accumulate in both the stalk and ear portions of the plant, AND that these two phases of accumulation are not linked to each other (Chibuogwu et al., 2024). The fungus can infect these parts separately at different times during the season and the subsequent accumulation of DON can happen differentially in the stalks vs. the ears. This is partially why you can go out to the field and scout for ear rot and not see a lot of infection (moldy ears) but still have high DON levels at chopping time. Some of that DON is likely accumulating in the stalks.

## **COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE**

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