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PRODUCER PROFILE #6



What Made Him Try Winter Wheat Again?

Heise's first interest in winter wheat was the fall seeding, which reduces manpower and machinery pressure in the spring. "Although timing the operation can be difficult, it is nice to seed in the fall," he says.

"Given the fact that Isabella usually has problems with low moisture, I can take advantage of that spring moisture and hopefully capture some high yields," he says. "That can mean an increase in my production."

There were other factors as well, including weed control considerations, a lessened dependency on herbicides, and different maturity dates compared to spring wheat.

"All those factors added up to why I wanted to try winter wheat again," says Heise.



Growing Challenges

Heise has found it difficult to manage winter wheat seeding operation in the middle of harvest, and a wet harvest can really delay seeding. "In wet years, soil moisture accumulates at a greater rate on winter wheat stubble. The crop is harvested early, and soil moisture builds during late season rains." Traditional spring crops are harvested later, using more of the late season precipitation before they mature. "This can be a Catch 22, because this added soil moisture would be a good thing in dry years," he says.

Another challenge can be diseases, which will greatly reduce yield. "It's important to apply a fungicide when disease levels warrant," says Heise.

The Producer...

KENDALL HEISE farms the family homestead south of Isabella, MB. He started farming in 1983, commuting to the farm from the various locations where he, his wife Angie, and two children were living. Now he's back at home, running a 2300 acre operation. He grows winter wheat, spring cereals, oilseeds, and pulse crops

The Heise farm straddles two different cropping regions. To the west is mixed crop land, and to the east, straight grain. The soil is black clay loam. An ongoing cropping challenge is a usual lack of rainfall, until the last few years.

Heise is returning to winter wheat after a long hiatus. In the 1980's he tried growing the crop for two years, but he wasn't happy with disease and lodging resistance the varieties then available offered. The new varieties with much improved traits prompted him to give it a go again, and he's grown it the last three years. It's a good fit in his zero-till operation.



Keys to Successful Production: Heise's Learnings

Heise has learned that early seeding (end of August, first week of September) is crucial. There also must be an adequate amount of nitrogen applied to the crop. "It's worth it for the good response and economic return," he says. Heise usually broadcasts 100 lbs per acre of nitrogen in the spring.

Heise can't say enough about the importance of winter wheat management through the season. "You've got to control volunteer spring wheat prior to seeding, control winter annuals in the fall once the winter wheat is established, and control volunteer winter wheat in fall after harvest. You have to break the "green bridge" before seeding winter wheat and not allow volunteer winter wheat to survive over the next winter," he says. "This will reduce the threat of wheat streak mosaic virus."

"I didn't grow winter wheat planning a best net return, but I've found it to be very good yielding," says Heise. "It brings in good cash flow if you sell into the feed market. The bottom line is that it's a profitable crop." **Average yields:** Heise's crop has averaged 70 bu/ac over three years.



Breaking the Green Bridge: Winter Wheat Management Notes

- ☞ *control volunteer spring wheat prior to seeding winter wheat*
- ☞ *control winter annuals in the fall when the winter wheat is established*
- ☞ *control volunteer winter wheat in the fall after harvest*



Advice Offered To Other Growers

Heise says planning well ahead is a key factor for successful winter wheat seeding operations. His best success has been seeding winter wheat into canola (with as much stubble as possible) for optimum crown protection during the winter months. "Plan the seeding date of your canola so that it can be harvested in time for the timely seeding of your winter wheat," he suggests.

Because winter wheat's yield potential is so high, Heise notes "it's not a crop you want to economize on with fertilizer. With adequate moisture, yields in excess of 80 bu/ac are possible."

Heise says producers shouldn't be intimidated by winter wheat. "As long as you follow weed control, seeding date, and fertility recommendations, production is not as hard as it sounds." Heise seeds at a rate of 1.5-2.0 bu/ac.

He also notes the importance of straight combining, as the seed will sprout very quickly in the swath; it has no dormancy like spring wheat varieties.