

Use of Geese for Grass Control

amount of grass, available water, field size, type of crop, among factors affecting use of naturally selective weeders

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The use of geese to clean fields of tough perennial grasses—such as Johnson, Bermuda, and nutgrass—has expanded in recent years to include nearly all broadleaf crops.

Geese have been used successfully in cotton, beets, beans, berries, trees, rose nursery, vineyards, hops, asparagus, potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, winter strawberries, and in plantings of nursery stock.

Usually young geese are more economical and make better selective weeders. Under grassy conditions in row crops, three geese per acre will be adequate, generally, although four geese per acre may be desirable in some cases. By the second year two geese per acre are considered sufficient.

The time to put geese in the field varies according to the crop. In cotton geese should be placed in the field as soon as the cotton comes up and weeds appear. Geese want young tender grass shoots. They do not like old grass.

A 30"-36" woven chicken netting or wire with light stakes will keep the geese confined to the field. In some cases—on the top of a levee, for instance—a 2' fence is sufficient.

Management of Geese

Geese are primarily weeders and costs should be considered as an expense of crop production. The cost of eliminating a grass—such as Johnson—by hand chopping and geese may be about the same for a year or two, but through the use of geese the grass can be eliminated and the ranch permanently improved.

Clean drinking water should be available to the geese at all times and by locating the water supply properly, they can be encouraged to cover the field.

Geese in row crops need shade during the hot weather. Trailers are commonly used to provide geese with shade in the San Joaquin Valley.

The amount of feed needed to supplement the grass diet depends upon several factors. When goslings are first placed in the field, they should be fed an all-in-one pellet—rabbit pellets are commonly used—at a rate of about 10 pounds per 100 geese per day, until they are about 10 weeks old. The amount of feed required thereafter will vary according

to whether the geese are penned up at night, the amount of grass, and the crop being weeded.

Midday is the best time to feed geese during hot weather. Except where geese are penned up at night, feeding at any other time will either reduce their efficiency or cause some mortality due to impaction or overeating. Large granite grit should be provided free choice near the shade.

Dogs have been the biggest problem with geese in the field because customary goose fencing has not kept dogs out. However, many growers have had no trouble from dogs. Where dogs are a problem, geese should be penned up at night and supplied with some feed.

Lameness has been another problem in some flocks but in most cases, malnutrition is the primary cause.

A third problem may be prussic acid or hydrocyanic acid poisoning which occurs only under special circumstances, but severe losses have resulted from this type of poisoning. Fast growing Johnsongrass that has been stunted by frost or

drought may contain prussic acid which is very poisonous to geese.

Insecticides—except toxaphene—used for insect control will not kill geese if applied while they are in the field. However, removal of the geese from the field while insecticide is being applied may be desirable.

Studies show that per acre costs of weeding with geese vary from farm to farm. The geese and fence material are the major costs. For a 40-80-acre unit the per acre costs are about \$5.00 for fencing, \$4.00 to \$6.50 for geese, \$1.50 for supplemental feed, \$2.50 for water and \$5.00 for labor and other items.

In addition to the regular costs of geese and equipment it may be necessary to hand chop if the grass gets away from the geese. However, experience has shown that the use of geese for two consecutive years in heavy Johnsongrass can eliminate the weed.

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Many row crops can be weeded successfully by naturally selective geese.

