

Sagebrush to Grass Conversion

Droughts in Modoc County just aren't as serious as they used to be. The reason? Close to 50,000 acres of marginal sagebrush-cheatgrass range have been converted to highly productive perennial wheatgrass pasture and the Agricultural Extension Service is directly responsible.

It all started over 30 years ago when Farm Advisor John Hays recognized the need for more dependable dryland grasses. He planted grass and legume nurseries around the county. He collected and evaluated information from these and from other sources throughout the west. His first plantings on cooperating ranches were mixtures of crested wheatgrass, Ladak alfalfa and yellow blossom sweet clover.

Yields jumped from 10 to 20 acres per cow for a 5 month grazing season to as high as two and three acres per cow. On some of the better sites ranchers were harvesting 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 tons of hay per acre. Varieties and mixtures have changed for the better through the years due to continued testing and looking. For instance, Topar Pubescent and Greenar Intermediate wheatgrasses have just about replaced crested. They are longer lived, more dependable and because of larger seed are easier to establish.

Harvest records show that on extremely dry years cheatgrass can fail completely. The deeprooted wheatgrasses never do and on poor cheatgrass years the wheatgrasses produce two to three times more.

The crop year just passed, 1965-66, was one of the driest on record in Modoc County. No one knows for sure how many sagebrush acres have been converted, but it could be as high as 50,000. If so, during this past year, this acreage probably produced as much as the 150,000 plus of sagebrush-cheatgrass that remains.

Droughts are still serious to our cattlemen and the economy of our county but because of this Farm Advisor program, started over 30 years ago and continuing today and into the future, they are not as damaging as they used to be.

Cecil Pierce, County Director
and Farm Advisor
Modoc County.



Picture: John Robison on Flournoy Experimental Range on Likely Table. Rows are different varieties of Wheatgrasses and Blue Grass.

Milt: Use your judgment about pictures. You may have something that shows sagebrush to grass conversion (or Jim Street)

Cecil