

## **Legend Lespedeza in the Heartland**

By Brenda Black

You can't have too much of a good thing according to cattlemen Bill Gentsch, Fulton, MO, and Alvin Brandt, Warrenton, MO. Both producers contend 'you reap what you sow' especially when it comes to lespedeza. Legend, the newest annual-striate lespedeza was "3 out of 3" as the top yielder in a three year forage test at Central Missouri State University. Now in its tenth year of commercial production, Legend continues to grow in popularity - it is certainly Brandt's and Gentsch's variety of choice. Last year's crop is paying great dividends for their spring calvers and providing some excellent winter feed for their entire herds.

Brandt maintains around 125 purebred Limousin and Lim-Flex, while Gentsch runs a Limousin influenced commercial herd of 250 and uses Hereford bulls. Their reasons for planting Legend lespedeza revolved around two product promises: timing and tonnage, which translate into more milk and more pounds of beef.

"My cows are breeding back and having their calves earlier since being on the Legend," says Brandt. "Cows who had February calves last year already have calves on the ground and plenty of milk."

Legend lespedeza is likely to be used most effectively as a companion legume providing high quality protein, energy, and minerals in cool-season grass pastures during summer months when it is needed most. Milk production, calf weights and reproductive efficiency are all closely tied to the animal nutrition during this period. It also makes high-quality hay.

Brandt broadcasted Legend lespedeza seed over 20 acres of fescue and red clover pasture. "I mowed fescue early and baled it, and the clover, in May," Brandt recalls. "Then the lespedeza came on and produced well after that and into a second cutting."

Annual Lespedeza tolerates infertile or acidic soils, is drought tolerant and it re-seeds itself in September. Lespedeza is also one of the few legumes that does not cause bloat.

Brandt stocked his Legend pasture with cattle and grazed 6" tall, leafy lespedeza.

"They seemed to really go after it," he says. "It is considerably more palatable than the red clover."

Gentsch noticed the same preference with his bulls. "I have Hereford bulls on feed, and everyday pour it in their troughs and then give them a bale of the Legend and they will root it out to eat the leaves, then lick the rest off the ground."

Last spring, Gentsch sowed 15 pounds per acre of Legend seed. He scattered it with a seeder off the back of his pickup across a 15-acre field where he previously harvested silage. "I sowed it on ground that was pretty much bare except for a skiff of snow. By August, it was really tall and so thick, you couldn't walk through it," Gentsch says.

"The first nine rounds with our New Holland 1411 conditioner produced 741 bales," he says. "We put up over 1,400 square bales then baled another 15 big round bales. The windrows were so wide, it wouldn't go in my square baler. I cut it fairly high because I wanted it to re-seed."

Legend lespedeza typically has more height and more leaf than other lespedezas. It does respond to fertilization, particularly phosphorus, but shouldn't be heavily fertilized with nitrogen in grass pastures. In most areas, this new lespedeza exhibits a definite advantage in drought tolerance and the ability to reseed itself.

Annual lespedeza can be used for either pasture or hay, and it can be grown with several grasses. It can be grown effectively in nearly all of the lower Midwest and throughout the South. A number of producers have also found the Legend lespedeza to work well with warm-season grasses, with adequate management, in both grazing and hay production in areas in Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.

Forage tests done in Arkansas and Missouri showed that Legend lespedeza had an advantage over other varieties of lespedeza, including Marion. Missouri's three-year test had Legend yielding over Marion by 30- 35 percent. According to Larry Sandage, former forage specialist in Arkansas, "Legend did so well that I would consider Legend the lespedeza of choice for northern and parts of central Arkansas."

Back in Missouri, Gentsch grinds the bales into feed and reserves his Legend stand strictly for hay production. His ration consists of 15 bales of Legend, milo and mineral. He adds some cooking oil from local restaurants to hold down the dust and sometimes adds a little soy meal, but not very often. "We put very little protein in our feed because of the Legend," he says, "and it grinds extremely well."

The next plan at the Gentsch farm is to make our forages work year round. "I'm tired of hauling hay," Gentsch explains. "I spend half of my day, every day, feeding cattle. I'm going to put up electric fence and we're going to run cattle on stockpiled forages. Some of the forage will grow taller than the square bales and all I will have to do is move a fence once in a while. I'm 65 and tired and it's the old man's way of doing business."

Brandt learned about Legend from a friend in the next county and, like Gentsch, after reading the field trials and testimonials, decided to give it a try. Gentsch has already recommended Legend, which is available from Cutting-Edge, to several neighbors and friends. "If you are satisfied," he says, "you will tell others. And I couldn't be more pleased."