

Russian Wildrye Grass

Elymus junceus Fisch.

Psathyrostachys junceus (Fisch.) Nevski

RUSSIAN WILDRYE GRASS



Seed Production of
Russian Wildrye Grass

Canada



Saskatchewan

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I. Introduction

Russian wildrye is a perennial bunch grass native to a large area of Central Asia from the dry, saline steppes of Iran to Western Siberia and on to Outer Mongolia. The grass was introduced to the Canadian prairies from Siberia by the University of Saskatchewan in 1926 and after testing, was distributed from the Swift Current Research Station to seed growers in 1949. Production of Russian wildrye in Western Canada has been relatively small. Between 1958 and 1975, production ranged between less than 100 - 250 tonnes with the exception of three years (1964 and 1973-1974) when well over 500 tonnes were produced. Production since 1976 has predominantly been much less than 100 tonnes.

The grass has two Latin names which have been in common usage: *Elymus junceus* Fisch., and *Psathyrostachys junceus* (Fisch.) Nevski; the latter name is gaining more prominent acceptance at the present time. The grass has an erect naked stem rising above an abundance of basal leaves, but seed stalks seldom form when grown in solid seedings. This growth habit provides good grazing for livestock during the entire grazing season except for the hot days of summer. The grass has rapid regrowth potential and responds quickly to summer or fall rains. The seed head is a dense spike which readily shells the seed as it matures. The size and shape of the seed is similar to the standard type of crested wheatgrass. Russian wildrye is more difficult to grow successfully than crested wheatgrass, however, because the germination and establishment of the seedling is markedly slower.

Russian wildrye has been grown for pedigreed seed on 200 - 600 acres in Saskatchewan in recent years (1994-1996) accounting for less than 5% of the pedigreed grass seed acreage in the province. Swift is the main variety multiplied for seed in Saskatchewan, although several other varieties are also grown for seed. Average seed yields are 75 kg/ac, but yields as high as 275 kg/ac have been harvested.

II. Field selection

A. Adaptation

Russian wildrye is adapted to loam and clay soils in all regions of the province. Because of the slow germination and establishment of the grass, it is very difficult to obtain adequate stands on sandy soils. The seedlings frequently do not develop adequate rooting in light textured soils before the soil dries. The grass develops an extensive fibrous root system which confers exceptional tolerance to cold and drought. Seedling and two year old stands of Russian wildrye are relatively tolerant to drought and highly tolerant to salinity. As the stand ages, the salinity tolerance of Russian wildrye relative to other grasses increases. Russian wildrye is also tolerant of flooding. Seed yields are more consistent in regions receiving 350-500 mm of annual precipitation. Under dry conditions, seed head formation may be inadequate to justify harvest of the seed.

B. Freedom from weeds

The field selected for Russian wildrye seed production must be free of noxious grassy and broadleaf weeds. A field may be left unattended for several weeks with only minimal weed growth and no appearance of quackgrass or Canada thistle only to have these weeds appear later. Noxious weed seeds disqualify the seed for market as pedigreed seed.

Weeds with similar size and shape of seeds to Russian wildrye are extremely difficult to separate at the cleaning plant. Primary noxious weeds which are inseparable are quackgrass, Canada thistle, and perennial sow thistle. Secondary noxious weeds which are difficult to remove from seed lots include wild oats, stickseed

(bluebur), and Persian darnel. Fields selected for seed production of Russian wildrye must be sown on land free of these weeds.

Three applications of glyphosate over two to three years are required to control quackgrass. Pre-harvest glyphosate application at 1 liter per acre prior to sowing the grass greatly improves control of quackgrass, Canada thistle, and sow thistle. Quackgrass from the seed bank and dormant rhizomes in the soil will re-infest the field, so several years of control are essential to reduce the possibility of recontamination. A fallow or partial fallow period prior to seeding controls several flushes of annual broadleaf and grassy weeds.

Prior to seeding the grass, weed control is easily achieved with broad spectrum herbicides and cultivation.

C. Freedom from herbicide residues

Russian wildrye seedlings are sensitive to injury from soil residues of grassy herbicides. The residues of trifluralin herbicides (Advance 10G, Rival, Treflan) pose the greatest risk of herbicide injury for new seedlings of grasses. These herbicides disappear from soil by volatilization. If these products have been applied at the maximum rate for oilseed or pulse crop production, grasses should not be sown for 24 months following a spring application or 30 months following a fall application. Fortress may also have some carryover residue if the volatilization of the herbicide is restricted by dry conditions. Russian wildrye should not be sown in a rotation directly following a crop treated with Fortress.

Other products which have injured grass seedlings include Ally, Assert, Atrazine, Banvel, Glean, Princep/Simazine, Pursuit and Sencor. Many of the herbicides in this listing are only problems if used at high rates in the growing season prior to sowing the grass. Check the latest edition of Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food's Crop Protection Guide for current guidelines.

D. Pedigreed Requirements

There are three classes of pedigreed forage seed production in Canada: Breeder, Foundation, and Certified. Foundation seed is grown from Breeder seed and Certified seed is grown from Foundation seed. The seed must meet standards for germination, genetic purity, freedom from disease, and absence of the seed of weeds and other crops. The Canada Seed Act specifies that seed must be pedigreed to be sold as a named variety.

The regulations for pedigreed status of seed are outlined in the Canadian Seed Grower Association Circular 6. In the year of seeding, the grower must notify the Canadian Seed Growers' Association of the pedigree of the seed planted and the area and previous cropping history of the production field. The field should be free of volunteer Russian wildrye prior to seeding. Manure or other potentially weed contaminating material should not be applied to the field prior to seeding or during the productive life of the stand. Table 1 summarizes the regulations on the minimum cropping interval.

Table 1: Intervening crop seasons before re-cropping with Russian wildrye as required by CSGA regulations

<u>Class of seed sown</u>	<u>Class of seed harvested</u>	<u>Contaminating crop</u>	<u>Number of intervening crop seasons required</u>
Breeder	Foundation	Non-pedigreed or different variety of Russian wildrye	5 seasons
Breeder	Foundation	Same variety of Russian wildrye	3 seasons
Breeder or Foundation	Certified	Russian wildrye	2 seasons

A field sown with Breeder Russian wildrye seed is eligible for five years of Foundation plus five years of Certified seed production. A field sown with Foundation Russian wildrye seed is eligible for ten years of Certified seed production. Two inspections are required annually for each pedigreed seed lot - a field inspection and a seed analysis. The production field must be inspected after the crop has headed, but prior to swathing or harvesting for each year that pedigreed seed is harvested. The seed lot must also be analyzed for weed and disease contamination and tested for germination. The identification tags from the seed bags must be retained for the life of the stand for presentation to the crop inspector.

Russian wildrye is cross-pollinated by wind and occasionally by insects. To maintain genetic purity, adequate isolation from other sources of pollen is essential. The isolation required depends on the class of seed produced and the size of the field as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Isolation distances required by CSGA regulations

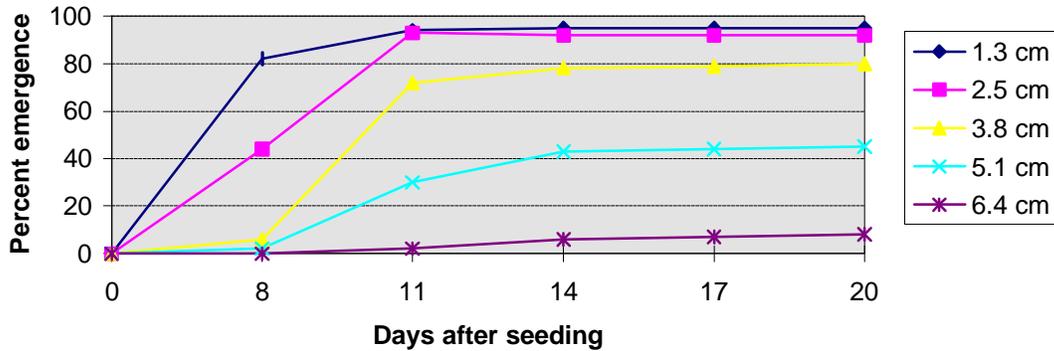
<u>Field Size (ac)</u>	<u>Pedigree of Seed Produced</u>	
	<u>Foundation</u>	<u>Certified</u>
Less than 5 acres	400 m	150 m
More than 5 acres	300 m	50 m

III. Crop establishment

A. Seeding

The main objective for the establishment year is to produce a healthy stand of seedlings which are vigorously tillering. Russian wildrye may be sown with any conventional planting equipment if shallow seeding and adequate packing are achieved. Sowing no deeper than one-half inch with firm packing helps achieve maximum germination and rapid emergence of seedlings. As the seeding depth increases, the time required for the seedling to emerge increases and the percentage of seedlings that emerge decreases (Figure 1). Although air seeder cultivators and hoe drills have successfully established Russian wildrye, disc drills are the most common seeding implement. Zero-till seeding provides the firm moist seedbed into which the seed can be planted shallowly without difficulty. When zero-till seeding, ensure that there are options for controlling volunteer crop seedlings.

Figure 1: Effect of seeding depth on rate of emergence of Russian wildrye seedlings (McKenzie et al., 1946)



A firm seedbed is the most important requirement for shallow, even placement of grass seed. Packing after the last tillage operation helps firm the soil. Pulse crop rollers are an excellent way to level and firm the soil prior to seeding. A rainfall following the final tillage operation will also firm and moisten the seedbed.

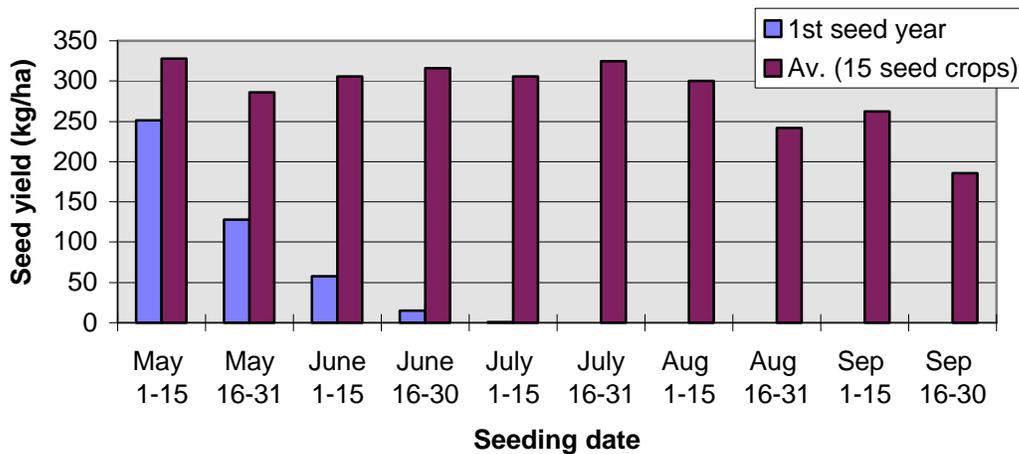
Planting into a “stale seedbed” is an effective method for establishing Russian wildrye. The land is tilled, packed, leveled, and left to settle for two to three weeks. Dew and one or two rains during the interim period firm the seedbed. A burn-off rate of glyphosate is applied just prior to or immediately after seeding with a disc press drill. The herbicide application effectively controls weed seedlings and minimal disturbance prevents new weed growth. The seedbed remains firm and moist to the soil surface which is an excellent environment for germination and growth of new grass seedlings.

Applying this technique for planting into standing cereal stubble is an equally effective variation. The standing stubble provides protection from the wind, an ideal microclimate for establishment of the grass seedling. The anchored stubble also reduces the risk of erosion from heavy summer rains. Effective spreading of chaff and straw prior to seeding are essential for successful use of this technique.

Simple equipment modifications relieve many potential difficulties and minimize the risk of poor establishment. Packing wheels ahead of the disc opener levels the seeding surface and packs the soil. Depth control bands on discs maintain a shallow sowing depth and prevent overdeep seed placement. Packer wheels following directly behind the seeding disc provide good seed to soil contact.

The Russian wildrye seed crop must be sown in early May to harvest a satisfactory seed yield for the first harvest. With any delay in seeding, the first crop seed yield will be reduced, but subsequent crops often compensate for the smaller initial seed crop. Many producers do not harvest a satisfactory seed crop until the third year following seeding. Research at Beaverlodge indicates that Russian wildrye should be sown prior to May 23 to obtain a satisfactory seed yield in the following year (Figure 2). Late fall and dormant seedings also work well for establishment of Russian wildrye, but no seed will be produced until the second fall after seeding.

Figure 2: Effect of seeding date on seed yield of Russian wildrye at Beaverlodge, AB (Elliott and Howe, 1977)



Russian wildrye has a light chaffy seed that readily bridges in seed cups. Bridging causes inconsistent plant stands and missing seed rows. Agitators in the seed box prevent bridging and improve the flow of the light chaffy seed to the seed cups. If agitators are not available for your seed tank to disturb the grass seed, filling the seedbox only half full and getting extra help to mix the seed in the seedbox while planting will work. Polymer seed coatings improve the seed flow in the drill and protect the user from exposure to any seed treatments which may be added to control disease organisms. Carriers such as phosphate fertilizer (11-52-0) up to 15 lb P_2O_5 /ac, non-viable grain, or horticultural vermiculite clay may be mixed with the grass seed to help prevent bridging. Seed may also be mixed with phosphate fertilizer and “drilled” through the fertilizer attachment. Fertilizer will absorb hygroscopic moisture from the air over time and increase the moisture content of the seed. The increase in moisture content of the seed will decrease its viability. Seed mixed with fertilizer can be stored up to 3-4 weeks without injuring the seed germination as long as the mixture is stored under dry conditions.

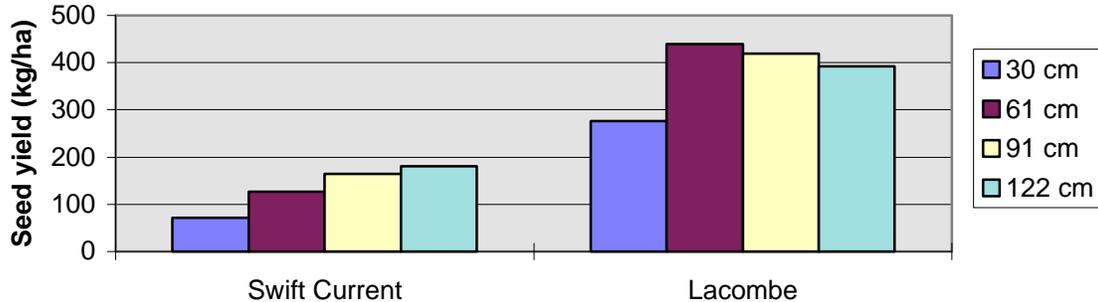
B. Row spacing

Wide row planting of Russian wildrye has several advantages. Planting in wider-spaced rows reduces the seed requirements, lowering input costs. As the stand ages, the plants can expand into the vacant area between the rows and maintain a higher seed yield potential. Although inter-row cultivation may stimulate new weed growth, tillage is easily performed with a row crop cultivator or gang rototiller. Weeds for roguing are easier to spot when the grass is sown in rows. Row production without irrigation also reduces the risk of seed yields reduced by drought. The ideal row spacing for the Brown and Dark Brown soil zone is 3 - 4 feet. In the Black soil zone, the 2 foot row spacing produces the highest seed yield (Figure 3). At the wider row spacing, some weeds and shattered Russian wildrye seed will invade the stand if inter-row cultivation or timely herbicide application is not practiced. If the inter-row is cultivated, the minimum row spacing should be increased to 30 inches.

The wide row spacings are easily accomplished with conventional equipment by placing tape over the unwanted seed cups in the seed box. Depending of the equipment, raising unwanted discs or seed boots may also be possible. Some growers release the spring pressure on hoe drills so that the shoe just rides along the

surface of the soil. With airseeders, blocking of outlets in discharge heads needs to be symmetrical to maintain uniform airflow. A wide range of modifications are easily accomplished depending on the type of equipment owned.

Figure 3: Effect of row spacing on seed yield of Russian wildrye on dryland (Lawrence and Heinrichs, 1968; Stelfox et al., 1954)



The seeding objective is to sow enough seed to achieve a satisfactory stand without too much inter-plant competition. Seedlings which are vigorously tillering will produce a higher seed yield. Because the weather is an important factor in successful establishment, the safe approach is to seed at a higher rate than is suitable for ideal conditions. It is wise for inexperienced growers to plan for loss of up to 80% of the seedlings. The seeder should be calibrated to sow 20 - 25 seeds per foot of seed row. When another material is mixed with the seed to eliminate bridging, the seeds per foot method of drill calibration eliminates guesswork. Russian wildrye, on average, contains 175,000 seeds per pound. For a row spacing of 2 feet and a seeding rate of at least 20 seeds/ft, one acre (43,560 ft²) contains 21,780 feet of seed row and require 435,600 seeds or 2.5 lb seed/ac. The drill is easily calibrated by seeding over a sheet of plywood or a pad of concrete and counting the seeds sown over a measured distance.

C. Fertility

The soil fertility of the seed field should be determined by soil analysis prior to sowing. When sowing Russian wildrye for seed production on fallow or partial fallow, nitrogen is likely adequate to carry the grass until the first fall after seeding. When stubble fields are sown prior to June 1, 20-40 lb N/ac should be applied to dryland fields and 40-60 lb N/ac to irrigated fields. A fall application of 30 lb N/ac to establishing seedling fields will promote maximum seed production in the first seed crop.

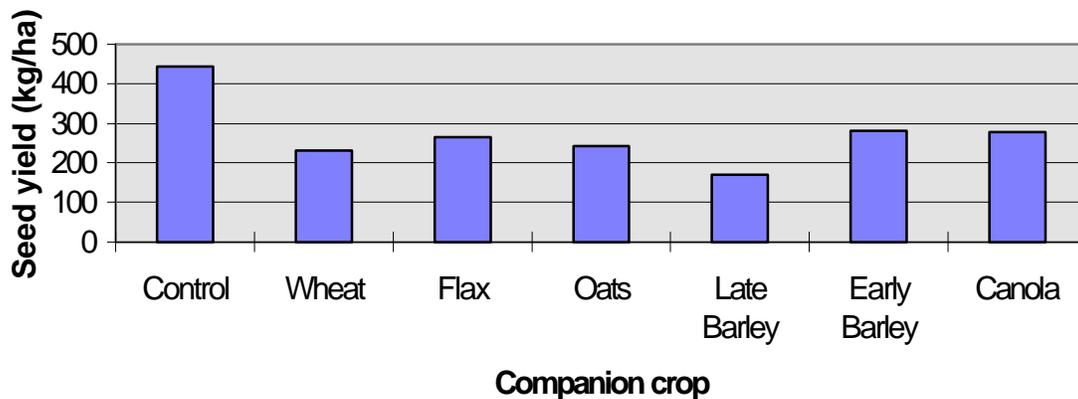
Phosphorus and potassium deficiency are best corrected prior to establishment of the crop. Phosphorus enhances the growth rate and vigour of the seedlings. Yield responses of grasses to applications of phosphorus and potassium are marginal once the stand is established. For fields testing less than 15 lb P/ac, phosphate fertilizer should be applied at 50-75 lb P₂O₅/ac. Likewise, for fields testing less than 200 lb K/ac, 100 lb K₂O/ac. should be applied prior to sowing the grass. Sulphur levels will be adequate if the field has been fertilized with enough sulphur for optimum canola production within the last two years. Russian wildrye responses to micronutrients have not been documented on the prairies, but the extensive root system of perennial grasses is likely able to absorb all required micronutrients.

The quantity of fertilizer which is safely placed in the seedrow with the grass seed is dependent on a number of factors. The organic matter and clay content of the soil, the moisture content of the soil at seeding, the time interval between seeding and the first precipitation after seeding, the row spacing, and the seedrow width affect the risk of seedling injury. As the content of organic matter and clay increase, risk of fertilizer injury to grass seedlings decrease. A soil moisture content near field capacity reduces "fertilizer burn" of seedlings. Rainfall immediately after seeding replenishes soil moisture and removes fertilizer salts from the vicinity of the seed. For a constant rate of fertilization, as the spacing between the rows widens, the amount of fertilizer next to the seeds increases. A narrow width of the seedrow itself will also place more fertilizer in close contact to the seed. The general guideline for forage seeds is for no nitrogen, potassium, or sulphur fertilizers placed in the seedrow. Application of phosphate fertilizer up to 15 lb P_2O_5 /ac is generally safe.

D. Companion crop

Seed production of Russian wildrye is much higher when sown without a companion crop. The seedlings are more competitive with weeds, grow larger and tiller more during the establishment year when sown without a companion crop. Little seed is harvested from the stand until the third year of growth. A trial conducted at Beaverlodge found seed yields of Russian wildrye with a cover crop averaged over eleven harvest years were only 56% of the no companion treatment (Figure 4). The least competitive companion crops are early barley, canola, and flax, but seed yields were depressed for two seed harvests.

Figure 4: Effect of a cover crop on seed yield of Sawki Russian wildrye at Beaverlodge (Elliott and Howe, 1977)



IV. Crop Management

A. Weed control

Weed control options are limited once the Russian wildrye is sown. Selective control of many broadleaf weeds is possible within the grass seed stand, but risk of reduced quality can be avoided and weed control measures simplified if these weeds are controlled before the crop is sown. Weeds also compete with the young Russian wildrye seedling, reducing its vigour and the yield potential of the stand.

Herbicide applications play an important role in the production of quality grass seed. Typical herbicide requirements during the seedling year for crops sown in the spring include late spring application of wild oat

and broadleaf herbicide followed by a second broadleaf herbicide in fall. The spring application in the seedling year is often replaced by mowing to prevent seed set of weeds, especially if weed populations are thin. A broadleaf herbicide (and a wild oat herbicide if required) is sprayed in early spring of the first seed crop. Check the latest edition of the Crop Protection Guide published by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food for new registrations of herbicides for grass seed crops.

Clipping or mowing is another effective strategy for controlling annual weeds. The weeds should be mowed as required to prevent them from setting seed. After the grass crop becomes established, fewer weeds will germinate during the seed production years.

Field roguing is a requirement for production of quality grass seed for the Canadian market. Primary noxious weeds such as quackgrass, Canada thistle, cleavers, and wild mustard must be removed from the stand. Selective herbicide control of quackgrass in Russian wildrye is not available. Quackgrass can only be removed from the field after sowing by spot spraying glyphosate with a backpack sprayer or hand roguing. Unthreshed wild mustard seeds lodge in the beak of the seed pod and this broken remnant of the pod cannot be removed because of its similar size to Russian wildrye seed. Secondary noxious weeds such as wild oats, Persian darnel, scentless chamomile, shepherd's purse, stickseed (bluebur), and stinkweed are tolerated in small numbers, i.e. 4-10 in 25 g.; however, some market standards are more stringent than Canada Seed Act standards. Certain seeds are very difficult to separate and must be eradicated in the field.

The seed grower must be vigilant to prevent re-introduction of weeds to the field. Crowns and rhizomes from previous perennial grass crops in the rotation will re-establish in seedling stands. Weed or crop seed in irrigation water or on equipment are one source of contamination when deposited within the field.

Downy brome is a potentially serious weed which occasionally appears in seed from American sources. Downy brome has a reddish head colour and if nested in new stands of Russian wildrye should be eliminated immediately.

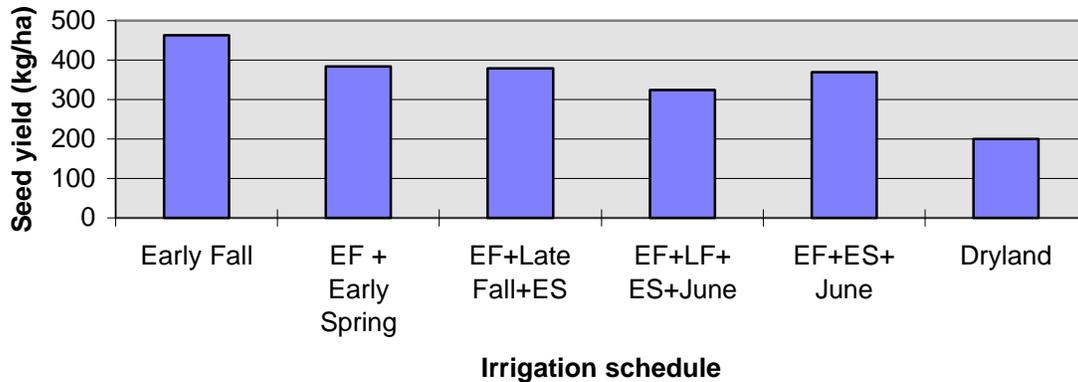
B. Disease and insect monitoring

Disease and insect problems in Russian wildrye seed fields are usually minor, but, on occasion, can lead to significant seed yield losses. The most common problem is silvertop. Silvertop reduces seed yield by prematurely halting development of the seed head. The head emerges from the stem, but turns white when the supply of water and nutrients is cut off. Insects puncture the stem and the seed head turns white once the plant is exposed to an environmental stress. A fungal disease, *Fusarium poae*, often appears at the injury. The end result is a conspicuous white seed head with no seed. The white seed head is easily removed from the stem by tugging on the white head.

C. Water management

Russian wildrye has a high moisture requirement. Seed production is very responsive to irrigation, but other management practices are also essential for profitable yields. Adequate early fall irrigation in drier areas is essential for high seed yields (Figure 5). The soil profile needs to be full of moisture during August while the plants are developing the next year's seed panicles.

Figure 5: Effect of irrigation on seed yield of Russian wildrye at Swift Current (Lawrence et al., 1988)



Seed production of Russian wildrye on dryland is also feasible, but more variable seed yields should be expected. Seed was harvested in nine of nineteen crop years. Strong correlations were found between August and September precipitation and seed yields in the following year. Nitrogen fertilization was essential to obtain this seed yield response.

V. Harvest

Grasses need about 30 days after flowering for the seeds to develop. Hot, dry weather shortens the ripening period while cool, moist conditions delay seed maturity. Grasses grown under irrigation or moister conditions have a higher ash content which increases the likelihood of shattering. Ripening begins at the top of the seed head and proceeds down the stem. Seeds at the top of the head may begin to shatter while those at the bottom are only starting to fill seed. Frequent inspection of the seed field is important to determine the best time to harvest the seed. Russian wildrye is usually ready to swath in mid to late July. The crop is ready to swath at the medium dough stage which corresponds to a seed head moisture content between 40-45%. At this stage of maturity, no liquid is left in the seed and some pressure is required to imprint the seed. The straw will be turning golden yellow at this stage. Some seed will shatter when the seed head is firmly struck against the palm of the hand.

The moisture content of the seed head is unreliable when determined with conventional grain moisture testers. The seed head should be clipped off just below the lowest seed. Sample enough seed heads to weigh about 100 g. After determining the wet weight, dry the sample in a conventional oven set at 82°C until the sample reaches a constant weight. The sample may also be dried in a microwave oven using relatively short heating intervals of about 1 minute. Place a cup of water in the microwave with the sample to prevent it from catching fire at lower moisture contents. Record the dry weight of the sample. The moisture content of the sample is calculated using the following formula: % moisture = ((wet weight - dry weight) / wet weight) * 100.

Conventional equipment is suitable for harvest of Russian wildrye. Some combines may separate more seed if equipped with a fan speed modification kit to slow the fan speed. Swathing and picking up the windrow is usually the least risky harvest method, but in years of low seed yield, early maturity or reduced foliage, straight combining may be more appropriate. Russian wildrye has a high shatter risk relative to other

grasses, but does not readily lodge. Swathing early in the morning or in the evening or at night when the air humidity is higher will reduce shattering losses. If the heads are laid in the center of the swath instead of to the side, some of the shattered seeds will be retained within the swath.

Windrows are difficult to pick up from between widely spaced seed rows. Cutting the crop at an angle across the seed rows minimizes this difficulty. If inter-row cultivation is practiced, however, the field becomes too rough to swath the field across the seed rows. One alternative is to direct combine the crop with a straight-cut header. Another alternative is to sow the crop with groups of three or four closely spaced (12" spacing) seed rows at intervals where the swath can be laid.

Under good drying conditions, the crop will be ready to combine in 4-7 days after swathing. Because of the potential for contamination and the value of grass seed, thoroughly clean the combine before threshing grass seed. Initial combine settings recommended for Russian wildrye are a cylinder speed of 850 rpm and a concave clearance of 1/16". The fan speed is generally set between 400-500 rpm with the sliding covers over the exterior fan housing closed. The combine should be set so that the lemma and palea are retained on the seed. Seeds which retain these seed parts have longer viability in conventional storage. The concave setting should be adjusted to minimize straw breakage so the sieves do not become clogged. A properly adjusted concave will just break up the head into separate seeds. Maintain an even flow of material into the combine. Russian wildrye often requires a slower forward speed than wheat to improve separation of the seed from the chaff and straw. The air flow needs to be high enough to lift the chaff about 10 cm at the front of the sieve so that the seed can be separated from the chaff on the sieve. A very clean sample, however, usually indicates that too much seed is being lost. Use a shovel to check seed loss at the back of the combine. Watch for plugging of the return when the sample is quite chaffy. The seed can be stored safely in storage bins up to one year when the moisture content is 10-12%. Mold growth and insect damage may still occur at this moisture content. The safe moisture content for storage of grasses for longer periods is 8-10%.

Russian wildrye is ready for straight combining at the first hint of seed shatter. Tetraploid varieties are less prone to shatter than diploid varieties, and therefore, are less risky to straight combine. When the seed shatters as the seed head is lightly struck against the palm of the hand, seed shatter is imminent and the field should be straight combined immediately. This is usually about 3-5 days after the crop was ready for swathing. The risk of losing the crop from brisk winds is high. Seed that is direct combined needs immediate aeration and drying to maintain seed quality. Some grass seed growers install an aeration tube directly into their grain truck so that the seed can be aerated without dumping into a storage bin. Running the seed over a sieve to remove much of the green leaves, insects, chaff and short-stemmed straw will reduce the risk of heating in the direct combined seed. Significant heating which reduces the viability of the seed may occur within only a few hours.

Handling of Russian wildrye seed can be challenging. Because of its light chaffy nature, the seed flows more like silage than like grain, especially if the sample is not dry. Belt conveyors and front-end loaders handle chaffy grasses gently and efficiently. Large diameter augers can effectively transfer the seed if the intake opening is large enough to avoid bridging. In the grain bin, the seed is sometimes more easily handled with a pitchfork than with a shovel.

Drying of grass seeds must be conducted with care to maintain the viability of the seed. When the seed has a high moisture content, the temperature of the air flow must be lower to prevent injury to the germination of the seed. The resistance of the seed to germination injury from high temperatures increases as the moisture content of the seed decreases.

VI. Post-harvest management

Two fall management practices of Russian wildrye which are critical to sustaining seed yield potential are stubble management and nitrogen fertilization.

A. Stubble management

The first step is to windrow the straw behind the combine and bale and remove the straw as soon as possible after threshing. If the stubble was cut quite long and moisture conditions are good, the stubble should also be windrowed, baled, and removed as soon as possible to stimulate high future seed yields. Immediately after harvest on young stands, grazing or mowing to leave 2-3 cm growth stimulates the highest seed yield in new stands (Figure 6). As the stand ages, less aggressive grazing or mowing and delaying the practice until October 1 maintains seed yields (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Effect of sheep grazing on seed yield of Russian wildrye at Swift Current (Lawrence and Ashford, 1964)

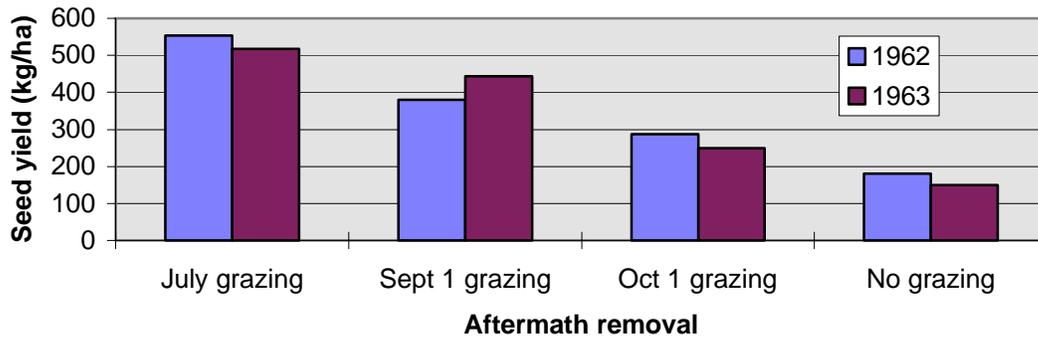
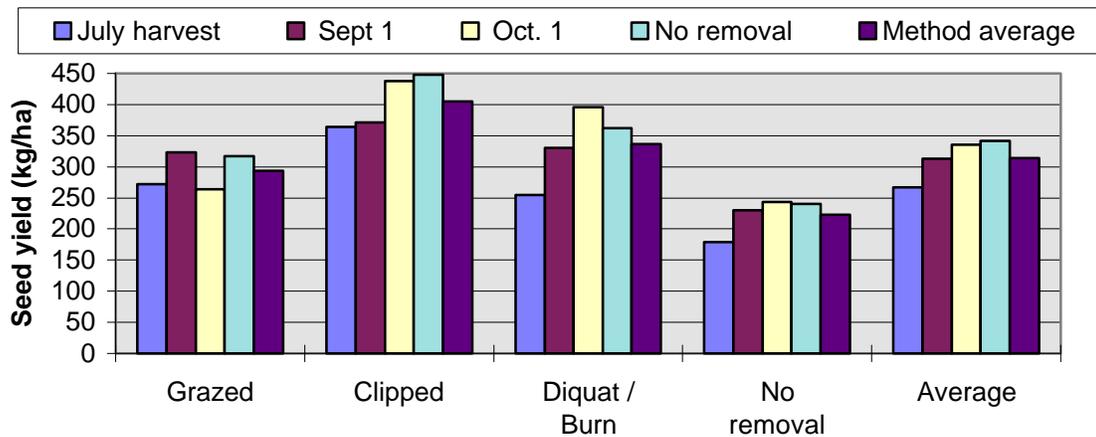


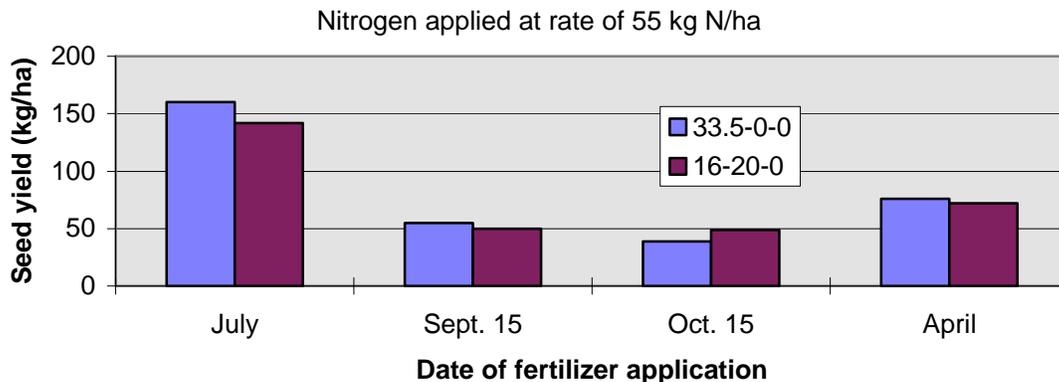
Figure 7: Effect of method and timing of aftermath removal on seed yield of Russian wildrye at Swift Current (Lawrence, 1970)



B. Nitrogen management

Nitrogen increases the seed yield of grasses primarily by promoting growth of tillers and by stimulating the growth of larger seed heads in those tillers which will form seed heads. Tillers must have grown enough to be induced to form seed heads by the correct daylength and temperature for each species. The period of the year when this physiological change occurs differs among grass species. The period when tillers are induced to form seed heads and when the new seed head starts to grow may occur very close together or may be separated by several months. Russian wildrye tillers are induced to develop seed heads in August and begin development of these seed heads in early autumn. Even though the seed heads do not emerge from the stem until the following summer, the nitrogen needs to be applied to Russian wildrye immediately following seed harvest to be present in the plant to promote the early growth of these seed heads (Figure 8). Dryland fields require 50 -75 lb N/ac and irrigated fields require 100-125 lb N/ac.

Figure 8: Effect of time and form of fertilizer on seed yield of Russian wildrye (Lawrence and Kilcher, 1964)



The form of nitrogen applied to grass seed fields has a major impact on the seed yield response when applied with a broadcast spreader. The best nitrogen source for broadcast application is 34-0-0 (ammonium nitrate). This form is highly soluble in water and readily moves with soil moisture to plant roots for rapid uptake into the plant. Ammonium nitrate is not vulnerable to volatilization and is less prone to adsorption by stubble residues in the field. Liquid nitrogen is another excellent N source especially if dribbled under cloudy cool conditions or applied by spoke wheel injection. Because grasses efficiently absorb water from the soil, risk of leaching or denitrification is minimal. The ammonium nitrogen in urea (46-0-0) or even ammonium sulphate (20-0-0-24) is not only less accessible to the plant but also more vulnerable to loss by volatilization. If the application can be timed just prior to a significant precipitation event, any N form will be equally effective.

VII. Stand removal

Russian wildrye is relatively easy to take out of rotation with application of glyphosate. The crop should be cut as high during the last harvest season to leave as many leaves as possible for absorption of glyphosate. Following harvest, glyphosate may be applied at 1-2 liter/ac on the green growth. The stand can then be broken with tillage with a lower fuel requirement. Some regrowth of the grass is likely during the subsequent growing season. If a broadleaf crop is sown the following spring, several graminicides are available to control regrowth of volunteer Russian wildrye during the growing season.

VIII. Additional references

Canadian Seed Grower's Association. 1994. Regulations and procedures for pedigreed seed crop production. Circular 6-94. Ottawa, Ont.

Smith, S.R. 1996. Pedigreed forage seed production. Can. Seed Growers' Association, Ottawa, Ont.