

# Grassland Oregon

## Blog

June 5, 2017

SucraSEED, FIXatioN, and some less-than-precision planting!

### Diary of a Father Daughter Pasture Experiment

By Risa DeMasi

**October 5, 2016-**

I talked my dad into trying some of our seed in his pastures. It's only taken 30 years of me being in the Seed Industry – and it was by bribing him with free seed. He's always subscribed to the thought that if there is something green and growing in the pasture, there is no need to spend any money to 'improve' things.

Today is the day – the seed had been delivered and the field prepared. In fact, the SucraSEED pasture mix already on the ground thanks to a friend.



Today we were going to overseed with FIXatioN Balansa, the clover I've been bragging about so much. Since he doesn't have any planting equipment, we had to improvise. My solution – use a hand crank lawn seed/fertilizer spreader...I'll sit on the front of the four-wheeler and 'crank' while dad drives up and down the field. Not exactly what you'd call precision planting. I'm sure it wasn't very uniform, but it got the job done and we used all the seed.



In the process, I dropped my cell phone somewhere in the field...didn't realize it until I got home that night. It was too dark to go back and look, not to mention the battery was all but dead so I couldn't call it to locate it. DRATS

### **October 6, 2016-**

Went back to the field this morning not really expecting to find my phone. It rained overnight and I was sure it was a goner. Amazingly the cell phone was just inside the opening to the field, good thing it was bare dirt or I never would have found it! WOW - it works! Thank-you Microsoft – your Windows phone is very resilient.

### **January 26, 2017-**

Went down to dad's to check on the pasture – he's out of town so no four-wheeler, I'll have to walk. It's been really wet, but I want to see what's there. The grasses are coming up well and I can find little baby FIXatioN plants, however they're a bit hard to pick out from all the buttercup that's also coming up.



There are a lot of 'surprise' plants germinating from disturbing the soil when the field was tilled. No herbicides were used – like I said – this wasn't 'precision planted'. There is also a lot of standing water. It's Oregon, and to be expected, but I'm glad I have good Muck boots...almost left one in the muck a couple of times. I see the FIXatioN is growing even in the standing water. So far, so good.

### **March 21, 2017-**

We've been getting way more than our share of liquid sunshine so I thought I'd go check the pasture again to make sure things aren't drowning. Dad is at the auction today, so I'm hoofing it again. Today is foggy, that dense fog that makes everything quiet; sound doesn't travel well. I can see the ground but not much more than about 50 feet in front of me.



Thankfully, the grasses and clover are still growing, and look surprisingly well considering. I did notice that there are lots of roots on the surface of the soil at the base of the plants. Can't say I've ever seen this before, I'll have to ask Jerry about it when I get back to the office.



I have to walk around the field quite a bit to find any FIXatioN in the growing grass. I didn't really expect to see much more top growth – this time of year the plants are spending almost all their energy on growth underground, developing their roots, but I was determined to find some of the young clover plants. They're there, just not easy to locate. Still surviving the standing water, in fact, it's easier to find them in the water because not much else can survive that environment for long.

Michael, my husband, got nervous waiting in the car, concerned I'd gotten stuck in the mud or was lying face down in a puddle unable to call for help. The fog didn't help. By the time he mucked his way out to this particular pasture, he'd almost lost his boots and suffered the demise he imagined me in. ...If I'd only brought my cell phone and not left it in the car...

### **April 21, 2017-**

The weather pattern has been stuck and I'm thinking of performing a 'sun' dance.... Today there's supposed to be a brief period of sun. I don't want to miss the chance so I'm hoofing it...again. Dad is out of town, and I'm beginning to think he's doing this on purpose. The cattle from the field between the house and the new pasture thought I was pretty interesting and gave me quite a bit of attention, so I returned the favor and took a few pictures while scratching their heads.





There are pockets of FIXatioN that are easier to pick out now. Other than the heavy concentration at the front of the field where we spilled seed every time we filled the seeder, I still have to walk quite a ways to find them.



They're starting to get taller – about 6-8 inches in the best spots and the leaves are getting that tell-tale jagged edge. I was able to take a few pictures of them with the sun behind them, I like the effect. Funny how attached to this field I've become. Sure hope this all works out – for all the bragging I've done over the years on our improved seed products.

The SucraSEED is getting pretty mature, and in a normal year it would be about time to let some cattle graze lightly, but this is no normal year. Our average annual rainfall is somewhere between 34-36 inches. Since January we've had over 30 inches and since planting, over 55 inches. Yikes. Still lots of standing water and still thankful for boots.



The tops of the plants look lush and green, but if you open them up and look down into the base – the bottoms of the stalks are yellowy and washed out.



I'm still seeing a lot of roots at the surface of the soil. Jerry says this is the plant's way of surviving – by growing up instead of down, in order to get oxygen and breathe.

Since the cattle had been so intrigued earlier I thought I'd be smart and try an experiment. I hand pulled a large amount of FIXatioN clover and a large amount of the grasses and laid them in piles about two feet apart. Wouldn't it be neat to capture on video any preference they might have to the different species? Well, they'd gotten bored while I was messing around in this pasture and wouldn't come over to where I'd laid the piles, regardless of how much I waved my arms and talked to them. So,...I gathered my camera, gear, my tripod and the mounds of forage – trying to keep them separate, and I went to them. After a bit of trepidation, they went for it, but alas, they just ate both of them up and stared at me with the stems hanging from their mouths. They seemed to like it.



The few moments of sun sure felt good.



**May 8, 2017-**

Dad and I have been trying to convince Leonard to move the cattle into the new pasture. It really needs to be grazed. The sun has been showing itself more and although the ground hasn't dried as much as we'd like, the forage quality of the grass is pretty rank at this point. The grass is throwing seed heads and the stems are stiff. All the energy is now in the very tips of the seed heads.



Since Leonard hasn't shown up yet, dad and I decided we'd try to do it ourselves. I positioned myself in the tall grass in the pasture near the opening, thinking it would be an awesome opportunity to capture video of the cattle rushing in like starved beasts devouring the new forage. It took dad awhile to get them rounded up, they were well conditioned to the electric fence that had kept them out since the planting. I stood up thinking I could help and ended up spooking the entire lot who bolted and scattered back into the field where they'd come from. Try again. Leonard and his son arrive and we finally get them into the field, but it wasn't easy. Certainly not the wonderful, idyllic, great-for-marketing footage I was hoping to get. In hindsight, I could have picked a better spot to shoot from – further away from the opening.



After collecting my gear and brushing off my ego, dad offered to take me deeper into the pasture and follow the cattle as they explored the new surroundings. He told me that they'd eaten their fill earlier that day when a feed trailer with grain had been placed in the original field. Despite this, and maybe from the stress of running all around while being herded into this new pasture, they were munching away. I guess it wasn't a complete lost opportunity.

**May 26, 2017-**

Tonight was my niece's graduation party, held at the farm. Dad called and wanted to make sure I wore clothes to visit the pasture, he wanted to show me something. There were rows that had been munched down and he wanted me to bring the camera. He seemed pretty excited.

When I got there we jumped on the four-wheeler and headed out. He said he could finally tell where we'd seeded because the FIXatioN was flowering making it stand out. He also said the crank seeder didn't quite spread the seed as evenly as we'd hoped. He started pointing out the 'rows', and then pointing down into the plant material.



The cattle had done a job on the clover. Dad said they 'really went for it, and ate it like candy'. We stopped in the middle of the field and you could clearly see at least 4 rows where the clover had been chewed to the ground and much of the grass had been left.



We drove through one of the other fields where we'd sprinkled some of the leftover seed on that misty day in October. You could see the distinctive FIXatioN flowers. I'd long given up on any of the seed 'taking' in that field and was ecstatic to see it there. The buttercup flowers and poa seed heads were also there, but I'm happy with baby steps.





While I wouldn't recommend our planting method or loose management strategy - if my Dad is happy, I'm happy. All is well with the world.



**\*Side note**— no fertilizer, herbicide or insecticides were used at any time. The plants were left to sink or swim. Fortunately, they swam. Literally.