FORAGE PEAS

Although forage peas are a minor crop in the Yuma area, local breeders view the crop with a winter niche as the production window for this crop is during the winter when most alfalfa harvest is completed for the season.

Forage peas are a valuable source of forage protein and are highly palatable with good digestibility. Peas are a suitable grazing alternative to increase forage yield and/or improve the nutritional quality of the forage.

With good establishment, peas grow rapidly creating a dense canopy and they will out-compete most weeds. Peas are a short-lived crop, requiring only a 10-14 week growing season to reach harvest.

Peas mixed with barley, wheat, triticale, or oat can allow for the production of high protein forage during otherwise unproductive periods. This mixture will also help to suppress weeds in the undersown crop.

Peas probably originated in southwestern Asia, possibly northwestern India, Pakistan or adjacent areas of former USSR and Afghanistan and thereafter spread to the temperate zones of Europe. Based on genetic diversity, four centers of origins, namely, Central Asia, the Near East, Abyssinia and the Mediterranean have been recognized. Non-pigmented peas to be used as a vegetable were grown in United Kingdom in the middle Ages. Pea was introduced into the Americas soon after Columbus and a winter type pea was introduced from Austria in 1922. Pea was taken to China in the first century. Peas were reported to be originally cultivated as a winter annual crop in the Mediterranean region.

As an animal feed, peas contain a moderate amount of high quality protein and a high level of starch. This makes peas a unique dual purpose feed, rich in both energy and protein.

Pea, or *Pisum sativum*, is an annual, cool-season grain legume, or “pulse crop,” primarily used as human food, but it is also used widely as livestock feed, forage and manure. As a forage crop, field pea is commonly grown along with cereal grains to increase the protein concentration.

Peas provide an array of diverse feeds that can be used in ruminant diets. Peas are palatable, highly digestible and can provide the sole protein source for most ruminants.

Feed peas have a relatively high and variable starch content making them a rich energy source for animals.

The desert regions of the lower Colorado River Valley is home to over 300,000 acres of winter vegetables. While most producers in the region typically produce a spring winter wheat, melon or cotton crop following winter vegetable harvest, many seek alternative cropping schemes that fit within the winter vegetable rotation. Intercropping field peas
with cereal grains for forage has great potential for winter production in the desert areas as the protein benefits of peas in pea/cereal mixtures has been shown to produce better quality silage than cereals alone.

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