



A small-grain header that attaches to a combine. *(Photo provided)*

Schuyler's small-grain crops

Our farmers find many beneficial uses for them

Special to The Odessa File

WATKINS GLEN, Aug 16, 2015 -- Small grains such as winter wheat, winter and spring barley, oats, rye, and triticale (a cross between wheat and rye) are grown in Schuyler County and throughout New York State. The fields can literally shine with the golden hues of the ripe grain at harvest time.

Starting in mid-July and continuing through August, many farmers are on their combines with small-grain headers, and soon after, baling the wind-rowed straw. Both the grain and the straw have value. The straw from small grains makes excellent bedding for animals, and rye straw is especially sought-after by farmers raising horses, also known as equine farmers.



These grains are also grown for forage for animals, which means they are chopped before reaching maturity or as a nurse crop for a new seeding of hay.

Small grains are excellent in crop rotations as their roots help improve soil aggregation and the winter grains provide cover on fields during the winter and early spring seasons, reducing soil erosion. Small grains in a crop rotation also help disrupt harmful pest populations, including weeds, which can increase in a strictly corn/hay rotation.

New York ranks 8th in the nation for oat acreage planted in 2014, according to the National Ag Statistics Service, while barley and wheat are lower in ranking. Small grains are an important crop, but they can be a challenge to grow in wetter climates, which can bring on leaf diseases and can delay planting of the spring grains. It takes a great deal of knowledge to grow them, and a sizeable investment in machinery. Seeing a beautiful field of small grains ready to harvest and the straw ready to bale, and knowing how much effort it takes to get to this point, makes one appreciate the scene even more.

Photo in text: A field of oats partially combined. *(Photo provided)*