



RETURN®



Sow the Opportunity: How to Cash in on Oats

Grow, graze, and profit on the new local oat market.

Inside, you'll find:

- Why oats are profitable again—why buyers are returning
- How oats reduce risk in a corn-and-soy economy
- The first local oat buyer in decades: Green Acres Milling
- A simple oat-rotation blueprint (spring and forage systems)
- How to pair oats with brood litter, for lower input costs
- A month-by-month action plan

WHY OATS NOW?

A Tough Market Needs Smarter Rotations

Shrinking margins on corn and soy. Higher fertilizer costs. Weather volatility. It's no surprise many Minnesota growers are asking whether running corn-soy on repeat is still the best play.

For decades, oats fell off the map—local buyers disappeared, markets moved north, and acres dropped from 20 million in the 1950s to under 1 million today.¹

But that's changing. Quickly.



Time to Give Oats a Closer Look

- **Low input costs** compared to corn and soy
- **Early harvest** that frees up the season for grazing or a second crop
- **Soil-building root structure** that improves spring seedbed conditions
- **Cool-season fit** for southern Minnesota and the Upper Midwest
- **A new local buyer** offering a stable market for grain-grade oats
- **Ideal for regenerative ag systems** offering a stable market for grain-grade oats

IN SHORT: Oats are no longer “fringe.” They’re becoming a strategic crop for farms trying to reduce risk and capture new revenue.

A New Buyer in Town*



Green Acres Milling – Albert Lea, MN

For the first time in decades, there will be a regional market for grain-grade oats. A farmer-owned oat mill in Albert Lea is now under construction. Working towards a 2026 opening, the \$55M facility is estimated to process 2–3M bushels/yr.

Why this matters:

- You no longer need to ship oats out of state.
- Premium, food-grade markets are now local.
- Your rotation can include a crop with a guaranteed buyer.

Get in Touch:

Green Acres Milling

2001 Sorenson Avenue, Albert Lea, MN 56007

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greenacresmilling.com

OF NOTE: This is one of the only farmer-led, US oat mills of its kind—built specifically to support Upper Midwest producers.

Oats: A Simple, Profitable System

Oats are cool-season annuals. They thrive in the early part of the year and work hard in your rotation. Here's how to start planning now:

December/January:	Order your oat seed early. Food-grade varieties may have limited availability. Get it while you can.
February:	Line up your fertility plan. If you're using brood litter, get it booked now. More on that below.
March:	Apply brood litter as soon as the ground is workable. Let it sit for 1–2 weeks, then work it in lightly or no-till plant your oats directly into it.
Late March to early April:	Plant your oats. The earlier, the better. Southern Minnesota growers typically target late March.

Options after harvest (June–early July):

- Double-crop warm-season annuals
- Graze regrowth or stubble
- Bale for forage
- Drill a fall cover crop (rye, clover, etc.)

If grazing oats:

- First graze at 6–8 inches
- Expect 45–60 days to first turnout in spring
- Regrowth often supports post-harvest grazing
- Oats are more flexible than corn, or soy.

Soil Health Benefits You Can See

Oats are a soil-builder. Their fibrous root systems improve till, break compaction, and increase water infiltration.

Growers report:

- Cleaner spring seedbeds
- Reduced weed and pest pressure
- Better soil structure heading into corn or soy

The Nature Conservancy calls oats **“a less stressful environment for soil”** and notes increased yields in following crops.

Can Oats Be a Fall Cover Crop?

Yes. But no... For market-grade grain, spring planting gives MN growers the best return.



Oats + Brood Litter = A Perfect Match

Oats don't need to be forced—they need consistency, moderation, and early-season support. Brood litter delivers a balanced nutrient package and organic matter that fuels steady growth without lodging or waste. The result is a crop that establishes quickly, stands clean, and leaves the field in better shape for what comes next.

That's why brood litter shines:

- Just enough slow-release N—without lodging risk
- High P, K, Ca, and micros
- Strong early-season biology
- Added organic matter to boost microbial life



Best Practice:

- Apply brood litter 1–2 weeks before planting
- Light incorporation or no-till—both work
- Skip the synthetic N—let the biology do the work

IN SHORT: Brood litter keeps input costs down while building long-term fertility.

An Oat Action Plan for Minnesotan Growers

January	• Research grain-grade varieties Place seed orders
February	• Book brood litter Select fields for oats
March	• Apply litter Prep drills/planters Plant late Mar–early Apr
April – May	• Scout weeds Plan forage or grazing windows
June – July	• Harvest grain Bale stubble or graze regrowth
August – September	• Double-crop or drill fall cover Monitor soil improvements
October – December	• Review field data Plan next year's acres Talk to your buyer about contract options

Need help sourcing litter? sales@returnco.com | 507.201.9248

The Bottom Line

Oats aren't just a cover crop anymore. They're making a comeback, not because they're trendy, but because they work.

They are a low-input system that creates flexibility when margins are under pressure.

Lower fertilizer exposure. Earlier harvest. Multiple revenue paths. Healthier ground for the next crop. There are a lot of reasons to look into oats.

The oats + brood system rewards moderation, timing, and balance. It cuts waste instead of chasing yield at any cost and gives growers options—grain, forage, grazing, or double crop.

And now, with a new buyer, proven fertility tools, and strong fit across the Upper Midwest, **an oats system is no longer theoretical... It's practical, scalable, and attainable.**

SOURCES

¹ USDA NASS Historical Data (1950–2023)

² Nature Conservancy, "Oat Crops as a Regenerative Opportunity"

³ USDA NRCS, Cover Crops Fact Sheet (2017)

GET IN TOUCH

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