

THE FORAGER

Agronomics with livestock in mind!

Four Management Practices for Successfully Growing Corn on Corn ~

Raising corn behind corn requires more management than raising corn behind soybeans. The four main variables to focus on are nitrogen, residue management, pathogen pressure and insect control. If producers focus on these considerations, they can successfully raise continuous corn (on the same fields).

First – nitrogen. This is one of the key inputs a grower needs to invest in. Corn followed by corn needs 30-50 lbs/acre of additional nitrogen applied compared to corn followed by soybeans. If the producer is side dressing nitrogen, target application window should be 18-30 inch plant height. Potassium is another important nutrient that needs to be monitored very closely. This nutrient is essential for maintaining strong healthy stalks. A bushel of corn contains approximately 0.27 lbs of potassium, while a ton of silage removes approximately 8 lbs of potassium from soil.

The next factor is residue management – one of the most overlooked variables. Improper residue management can delay planting, cause poor seed-to-soil contact and improper planting depth, and increase pathogen pressure and toxicity issues from decaying plant material. When selecting fields for this rotation, remember tillage and well-drained fields are important. Row cleaners should be standard equipment to keep the previous year's root masses from affecting planting depth and to help ensure accurate planting depth. Corn following corn in no-till can be less consistent and should be reserved for well-drained acres. Proper planting depth of 1.5-2 inches will also aid stand establishment. This will provide good seed-soil contact. Monitor soil moisture levels at planting to avoid side wall compaction, and properly close the seed slot. Use of the newer finger-type closing wheel has helped in tougher soils.

The third factor is pathogen pressure and disease control. Corn following corn is subject to much higher levels of soil and airborne pathogens. Producers need to choose healthy, defensive hybrids with a history of performing well in stressful environments. Tillage is not only beneficial for reducing residue, but also reducing fungal inoculum. Another practice that is increasing in popularity is the use of foliar fungicides. Fungicides have proven successful against common foliar diseases like Gray Leaf Spot, Northern Corn Leaf Blight, Rust and Anthracnose. However, timing of these applications is critical. Most crown and stalk rot result from soil-borne pathogens and the best defense is healthy genetics.

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Finally – insect control – the most obvious management difference when planting corn following corn. Scout and control pest pressures to ensure maximum yield potential. Corn traits combined with seed treatments offer convenience and peace of mind in managing pest pressures.

In conclusion, remember that corn following corn often requires higher input costs and traditionally has a slight yield disadvantage to corn rotated with soybeans. Data from a 10-year study at Purdue University suggested that the yield drag associated with corn following corn ranged from 3-18 percent depending on tillage, with Moldboard plowing and chiseling providing the least yield loss. Producers should choose their best, well-drained acreage, along with selecting good genetics, scouting the crop regularly for pests (and other potential concerns) ~ and they can be successful growing corn on corn.

(Edited from an article by Derwin Druist, Agronomist/Syngenta)

“TIPS” ON ESTABLISHING ALFALFA STANDS

There are many factors to be aware of when seeding an alfalfa crop:

- Alfalfa does best in deep, well-drained soils. Avoid wet, low-lying fields.
- Fertilize to bring P and K levels into the medium category or higher. pH levels are important in all crops, but they are especially critical to raising good alfalfa. The pH level is best at 6.8-7.0.
- The seedbed must be free from clods and firmed up well. Cloddy or loose soils do not allow for good seed-to-soil contact, especially for small seeded crops.
- Plant any time from early April to early May. Seedlings are very cold tolerant at germination; however, are susceptible at the 4-leaf stage. Companion crops do provide some protection – but also compete for moisture and nutrients.
- After seeding, use packer wheels or some form of packing operation to ensure a firm soilbed.
- Average seeding rate recommendation is 18-20 lbs/acre

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