

# FORAGER



*Agronomics with livestock in mind!*



## WINTER KILL IN ALFALFA...

Winter damage to alfalfa fields is not uncommon in northern regions of the country, which include the northeast and Midwest. Most winter injury is caused by one of three conditions: extremely low temperatures, fluctuating temperatures, or persistent ice sheeting. Most areas experience at least one of these conditions during the winter, with most having to deal with fluctuating temperatures throughout the winter this year (2006).

**Extremely low temperatures** – Alfalfa foliage is injured when temperatures drop below 28°F. Roots and crowns are not injured until temperatures drop below 0°F. Snow and stubble usually insulate alfalfa from these conditions.

**Fluctuating temperatures** – Temperatures of 50 to 60°F for a few days can cause alfalfa to break dormancy.

Crown buds began to grow and use root reserves. Then when cold temperatures resume crown buds are killed. Fluctuating temperatures freeze and thaw the soil causing frost heaving, lifting crowns up out of the ground. This can break the root, exposing the crowns and roots to harsh cold, drying conditions, and separation.



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**Ice sheeting** – If fields are covered with ice for a week or more, the alfalfa plant can be smothered, as CO<sup>2</sup> is not released. Ice also does not insulate well.

**Management techniques** can help to minimize winter alfalfa losses. These include:

- ❑ Select varieties with adequate winter-hardiness and good fall dormancy.
- ❑ High disease rating for your areas.
- ❑ Not planting fall seedings after the recommended final planting date in your area.
- ❑ Maintaining soil potassium levels.
- ❑ Allowing alfalfa to replenish root reserves at least once annually.
- ❑ Avoid growing on poorly drained soils.
- ❑ Walk fields in the spring, taking stand counts to determine winter kill damage. Delaying first cutting in damaged fields to allow plants to restore root reserves.

Spring is an excellent time to plant alfalfa, especially in fields that have experienced damage from the past winter. We offer a range of quality alfalfa varieties that will suit most any farm needs and scenarios. Advances in breeding and hybridization are opening up more and more

varieties that can help to counteract the impact of winter damage to alfalfa.

## The Seed Business

Do you get frustrated with seed availability? This is a recurrent concern for many consultants and producers, all looking for specific hybrids that they hope will perform up to and possibly beyond their expectation. The order is submitted... and availability is uncertain. Why? There are many answers to this question. However, the most common is something naturally inherent to the seed business and seeds in general.

Seed, unlike other goods, is grown and not manufactured. The fact that seed is a live product makes it even harder to forecast and manage. Seed companies, like all growers, are at the mercy of the environment. We never know what the weather will be like throughout the times of planting, growing and harvesting. This impacts yields, as well as quality. Yield losses and all-out production busts are common extremes, resulting in unforeseen marketing and availability problems. Seed sizes also depend on the growing conditions and the propensity of the variety to throw certain sizes.

The biology of agriculture creates headaches for all of us. However, with an understanding of the nature of the industry, and evaluating changes with producers, we can still offer the best opportunity to make milk from seed purchasing decisions. Work with your producers to select hybrids that they can anticipate will work in the context of their nutritional and agronomic programs. It is also helpful to examine alternatives – in the event that the hybrid they are looking for is not available. There are numerous hybrids that will perform in a similar, if not identical way. Review all the facts and make selections that can have a quality impact on rations in the coming season.

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PRESERVATIVES & INOCULANTS!**

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