

FORAGER



Agronomics with livestock in mind!



MAKE THE MOST OF WHAT YOU HAVE

With the wet spring it is estimated 10 – 20% of tillable acres were not planted due to the weather in many areas. This, compounded with skimpy feed inventories due to droughts the last two years, and low milk prices, have many producers pulling out their hair.

Now as we move into the first part of July many are still hanging on to the glimmering hope that they can get more crops in the ground. Unless you have a reliable relationship with Miss Cleo, July is a very risky time to plant any crop. The heat and dry weather can kill small seedlings quickly.

With spring planting season over it is time to turn attention to items that can help yield a little more forage. Each operation needs to make the most of what they have. Capitalizing on what is available and maximizing yields could be the determining factor for a farm staying profitable this year.

Fertility

Thousands of acres of corn are suffering from nitrogen deficiency due to wet soil conditions. Side-dressing nitrogen should increase yields significantly this year. Alfalfa and grass stands are in similar shape. A drought, a hard winter, and a wet spring have stressed alfalfa stands. Top dressing to maintain phosphorus and potassium levels in alfalfa fields, and nitrogen levels for grass, can help improve yields and stand life.



Pests

Insect pests such as the Potato Leafhopper are hitting alfalfa hard in many areas. Leafhopper and other pests not only hurt yields, they can also significantly reduce forage quality. Watch fields for insect pests and manage as needed to minimize economic damage.



Weed Control

The wacky weather played havoc with herbicide programs this year. Cornfields with significant weed pressure should be sprayed or cultivated as soon as possible.

Harvest Timing

Maximizing quality is always important to producing a profitable forage crop. This year's corn planting was stretched out over a 10 week period. With the large spread in planting time it is important to closely monitor corn fields, harvesting each field when it reaches the desired harvest moisture to avoid inconsistent silage.

Fall Crops

Despite it being extremely tempting to get into fields right now, the most prudent decision is to wait until early August or next spring to plant a crop. In August spring oats, peas and triticale, Italian or Annual Ryegrass, and forage seedings (legumes, grasses) can all be planted. Spring oats, as well as peas and triticale, can produce a cutting in about 60 - 70 days (depending on the weather) after planting. Winter triticale used in pea mixes will come back in the spring for an early harvest as well. Italian and annual ryegrass can offer fall grazing or cutting, as well as an early cutting the following spring. Establishing a seeding of alfalfa and/or perennial grasses will free up time for next spring's planting and enable an earlier first cutting harvest.

Available Corn Silage

This past week a number of grain growers have started to realize that their corn may not mature enough to be harvested for grain. While many grain hybrids are not the ideal corn for silage, it could be one of the few options for purchasing local corn silage for a livestock or dairy operation this year.

Mother nature has dealt many areas of the United States a tough hand the past few years. All things considered, most crops that were planted this year are looking good. With some warm weather, some sunshine, and a few timely showers many acres could put up huge yields compared to past years. Keep in mind quality forage is extremely valuable this year. Dollars spent on inputs like fertilizer and chemicals will pay off.