

# FORAGER



*Agronomics with livestock in mind!*



## Forage Stands

Challenging weather and heavy field traffic have wreaked havoc on forage stands. With the cool, dry spring many growers have not been able to get new stands established. Other areas received pounding rain, which has caused soil crusting. Fall seeding may be a good option for many growers. Seeding in late summer or early fall, depending on your geography, offers a lot of benefits, which include:

- Weed competition is usually not as intense, resulting in cleaner stands and lower weed control costs.
- Stand establishment is completed early, allowing for increased yields the following spring.
- Diseases that attack alfalfa seedlings are usually not as prevalent in the fall.
- A more favorable window of time is available for seeding.
- Wet fields are usually dry and ready to work.
- Alfalfa and grasses can be no-tilled directly into corn or small grain stubble.

Some of the nicest and most productive forage stands are fall-seeded. It is an excellent time to establish a crop, but does require some management considerations:

- Seedings of alfalfa and reed canarygrass need at least 8 weeks of growth prior to the first killing frost to ensure winter survival.
- Seeds should be planted 1/4 to 3/8 inch deep (depending on the crop) with good seed-to-soil contact, making optimal use of available moisture.
- Use companion crops with caution, since they may use up the moisture needed by the seedlings.
- Avoid cutting summer-seeded alfalfa until next spring, as it could result in stand loss.
- Generally, summer seeding rates should be increased by about 15% over typical spring seeding rates.

- Including cool season grass seed with the alfalfa can improve stand yield and forage quality.

In most areas of the Northeast and Midwest, alfalfa can be seeded from late July to mid-August. Most cool season grasses can be seeded into September in many locations. Growers who take advantage of fall seeding will be less dependent on good spring weather [next year], and should enjoy a more productive first-year stand.

Another good option is to drill BMR Sorghum-Sudan Grass into a thin alfalfa stand. This is about the only option that still can be done this season to increase forage tonnage. Planting BMR Sorghum-Sudangrass can be done successfully until the end of June. If planted after this date, it will be too late to get a good crop. Agronomically, this will continue to thin out an alfalfa stand, so thin or older stands would be the ones to target for this planting option. This combination works well for increasing tonnage (and fiber digestibility). Sorghum-Sudangrass needs to be drilled soon after cutting to allow the plants to germinate and grow before the alfalfa gets going and shades the ground or seedlings.

## Preservatives and Inoculants

Have you purchased your forage preservatives? Wetter haylages present several challenges. Limited wilting and longer wilting time can produce environments that favor the production of detrimental microbes, and give molds and yeasts more time to contaminate the crop. Haylage is also cut lower to the ground [than corn silage] and can have significantly higher levels of clostridia, ash and/or iron than corn silage. Using a quality preservative or inoculant can help get forage fermentation going in the right direction.

Questions on agronomy or seed?  
Call the Agronomy Office!  
**1-800-346-3649**