

FORAGER



Agronomics with livestock in mind!



In the Field - SPRING PLANTING

Spring is just around the corner, and before you know it plows and planters will be rolling across the landscape. With last year's climatic challenges, thousands of acres of crops were never planted. This year many growers will be forced to make up for last year's short falls, which is sure to bring an action-packed spring.

Every spring, regardless of weather, there are always a few common planting mishaps that seriously set back forage production. The good news is most of these mishaps can be avoided with a few early season adjustments and some forward planning.

The most common reason for seedling failure is planting too deep. Most forage grasses and alfalfa should only be planted about a ¼ inch deep. Keep this in mind when seeding by checking the seed depth the first few times around the field. Even if you have not changed the drill settings, different fields with softer soil conditions may plant deeper. Do not forget to check the planting depth when planting corn as well. Corn seed should be placed at a 1.5 to 2 inch depth.



Compaction can cause significant yield loss for multiple years. Traveling across fields with spreaders, tillage equipment, or planters before the ground is fit can result in severe compaction. Compacted soils limit water movement, and root growth. Limited root growth results in low nutrient and water uptake, increasing the probability of drought stress. Compaction can limit yields for years into the future. Late May corn plantings, in the northeast, yield about 4% less than early May plantings. However, there can be huge yield losses from compaction that results from planting before the soil is dry enough.

Missing the planting window in your area often means the difference between a great crop and a questionable crop. Virtually every spring there is a week or two that the weather and fields are perfect for planting. If that window is missed we are often forced to fight harsh weather, as well as the demands of harvesting other crops. Sometimes, breakdowns and other circumstances that are beyond our

control cause us to miss the planting window. Getting equipment and supplies ready early can help to ensure you take advantage of the available time. Hours spent in the shop in the winter can save days out of the field in the spring.

Identify the planting rate for all varieties or crops that will be planted, and make sure you have enough seed to cover the planned fields. Running out of seed with bad weather on the way can be a big headache. When planting corn, keep in mind that hybrids vary in their ability to handle different populations. You should be able to find a median-planting rate that all the hybrids you are using will perform at. Hybrids will not perform as well when planted outside of their recommended population ranges. Speak with your seed representative or read the product literature to ensure you are planting at the recommended rate.

Growers should have farm and field maps available. These make it easy to explain what and where field work needs to be done for employees or custom operators. Mistakes, like planting corn over a field that had been planted into alfalfa the week before, can be extremely costly, and happen frequently.

Although we cannot control the weather, most breakdowns or other mishaps, taking time to think ahead and preparing early will make this planting season go as smooth as possible.

FROST-SEEDING KEYS

Late winter and early spring bring dreams of lush frost-seeded stands. While it can be a viable option to improve a thinning pasture or meadow, attention to variety selection, good timing, and luck are needed for success. Only species with good early vigor such as orchardgrass, ryegrass, festulolium, and red clover should be used for frost seeding. Timothy, reed canarygrass, and alfalfa should not be used for frost seeding. Spread the seed when temperatures are fluctuating between freezing and thawing for best results. Avoid trying to frost-seed a field with equipment when it is too wet. Ideally, walking the field or using a low pressure ATV works best when spinning on seed. Compaction inhibits seedling growth. Never frost seed in place of conventional planting. Drilled seed has a much better chance of getting established than seed that is frost-seeded.