

THE FORAGER

Agronomics with livestock in mind!

IS IT TIME TO REPLANT MY ALFALFA FIELDS?

If your alfalfa stands have been in production for three or more years, it might be time to replace it. Fall is the best time to evaluate the productivity of alfalfa stands by looking at plant density and crown, and root ratings.

SPOT STAND ISSUES IN THE FALL

SITUATION

As alfalfa stands age and thin, production can drop. Typically fields begin to decline in their third year of production. Field evaluation helps identify less profitable fields that need to be targeted for replacement.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- When to assess fields
- Plant density
- Stem density
- Root health

ACTION PLAN

- 1. Assess stands in fall:** Fall is the best time to evaluate productivity of alfalfa stands. It allows time to plan for fall tillage and alternative cropping prior to applying fall fertilizer or spring herbicides. Checking fields in fall also helps you anticipate weed control needs. Spring assessment is still valuable to evaluate winter injury or kill.
- 2. Determine plant density:** The number of plants in a square foot provides clues to stand health. As population decreases, weeds can invade. Low plant populations also can decrease alfalfa quality. Plant count once was the preferred method for estimating alfalfa yield, but we now know that stem density is a better predictor of yield potential. Older stands may have fewer plants, but the remaining plants are likely to have many stems. It is still important to evaluate plant count to determine if there are enough to maintain the crop.
- 3. Determine stem density:** Potential yield in alfalfa is determined by counting the number of stems/square foot. Evaluate 3-4 representative areas of the field. Mark off a 2-square-foot section of each area and count only the stems tall enough to be cut by the mower. Divide your count by two to determine stem density.
- 4. Evaluate root health:** Look at a few alfalfa plants across several areas of the field. Dig up the entire crown and at least 6 inches of the tap root. The crown and root should be symmetrical with many shoots emerging from the top and sides of the crown. Cut the crown and root lengthwise to look for root rot and discoloration. The more discoloration and rot in the root, the lower the yield potential of the plant.

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SUMMARY

Consider many factors when making a decision to keep or replace an alfalfa stand. Assessing stem density may be a good starting point. Keep an eye on the number of plants per square foot and evaluate roots to help predict the yield potential of an alfalfa stand. For more information, contact the Renaissance agronomy office for information or to refer you to a Mycogen Seeds agronomist or trusted agronomic adviser.

(Edited from an article in the Mycogen Agronomy Bulletin 23, with contributions by Travis Keene, Mycogen Agronomist)

Alfalfa... what, when and which?

If you are looking for alfalfa varieties that can meet the goals and growing conditions of farms in your area, Renaissance has an excellent selection available from Mycogen Seeds, Wolf River and AgriCulver/Seedway. It is important to know the hardiness zone for your area, when assisting a producer in making a selection. While winter is not the time to plant/replant alfalfa stands, it is important that seed product is ordered in sufficient time for early spring planting. Replacing old(er) alfalfa stands can have a positive impact on available forages throughout the growing season and [especially] during winter months for feed-out. Review production records for stands from the past season, as you assist producers in evaluating their cropping needs for 2012. Work with your producers in planning ahead – whether it is to replace an alfalfa stand, reseeding a pasture, growing quality corn for silage and grain, or considering grasses and small grains to improve forage/feed inventories. Contact our agronomy office for more information today.

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Contact our Agronomy Office for Information & Support

1.800.346.3649

