

# THE FORAGER

*Agronomics with livestock in mind!*

## Establishing Forages & Pastures

We all faced some extraordinary challenges in 2011, and were left with hard decisions that impact the future! Unfortunately, when it comes to crops we haven't experienced a "normal" growing season for some time. We [all] have to have the ability to adapt and overcome the changes that come our way. However, we still have to go back to our "roots" and do things correctly. With the poor condition of most pastures due to drought conditions or flooding, lack of new establishment, etc., it would be a good time to revisit the basics.

Establishing forages and pastures is a key step in having a thick, lush, and profitable stand. With attention to a few important steps, a producer can prepare to have greater success. This includes: a) properly preparing soil and setting the drill to the right depth decreases the risk of planting too deep and reducing the stand; b) properly using cover crops (or eliminating them) to attain a good stand without too much crowding or shading of the desired crop; c) correctly managing the height of an existing pasture can allow a producer to have very good success with frost-seeding grasses and clovers to enhance a forage field to gain profitability.

A properly prepared seed bed is worked well with a culti-packer or other tillage tool that will help to firm the soil. It is best to test the soil to determine if it is firm enough for planting. This can be done by walking through the field! If the heel of a boot leaves more than 1/4" of an imprint, it is advisable for the producer to make one more trip over the field with the packer to make it firmer. Even if using a Brillion-type seeder, it is best to prepare a good, firm seed bed. Don't simply count on the seeder to provide the necessary firmness. If a producer is still no-till seeding into an existing pasture or for a new pasture it is vital to have proper seeding depth and seed coverage. The proper seeding depth for forage grasses and legumes is approximately 1/4 to 3/8" deep. This will be attained by properly setting the drill and sowing into a firm, moist (but not wet) seedbed.

Frost-seeding in late February and into early March is a common practice for establishing legumes into an existing pasture. One of the keys to success with this practice is to control the growth of the crop intended to frost-seed into. Grazing or clipping existing pastures when they reach 8-10" and cutting down to 4-5" will allow sunlight to reach the new seedlings.

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Many species can be frost-seeded. The greatest success with this approach will be found with ryegrass, festuloliums, and clovers, since they establish quickly. This practice generally works well, especially if spring weather conditions are moist and cool. In spring weather that is warmer and drier-than-normal the seedlings will not be as vigorous and will often not establish as well.

*(Edited from an article in by Scott Rush, AgriCulver/Seedway)*

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*It's not too late to sell corn hybrids (selecting from whatever might still be available)... or too early to promote seed products for frost-seeding pasture and grass/alfalfa stands for hay or haylage. We offer a full lineup of excellent seed products – from grasses and small grains, alfalfa varieties, triticale, etc. This can help producers make a difference in available forages this spring and throughout the coming fall and winter timeframe.*

Have you encouraged producers to purchase their preservatives and inoculants ahead of time? This can facilitate better pricing, as well as ensure that producers have the products available when they need them. Be sure to include **FRESHCUT®** for baled hay, as well as the many other outstanding products we have to offer. Using a quality inoculant or preservative can make a quality difference at feedout, helping to ensure better nutrition from ensiled forages.

