

Scott's Seedings

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Establishing Forages and Pastures

We were all faced last year with some extraordinary challenges and have been left with hard decisions impacting the future! Unfortunately, we haven't experienced a "normal" growing season for some time and we all have to have the ability to adapt and overcome the changes that we were dealt. BUT, we still have to go back to our roots and do things correctly. With the poor condition of most pastures due to drought conditions, flooding, lack of new establishment, etc. that it would be a good time to visit the basics.

Establishing forages and pastures is a key step in having a thick, lush, profitable stand. With attention to a few important steps the producer sets himself up to have greater success. By properly preparing his soil and setting his drill to the right depth he can decrease the risk of planting too deep and reducing his stand. By properly using cover crops (or eliminating them) he can attain a good stand without too much crowding or shading of the desired crop. And by correctly managing the height of an existing pasture he can have very good success with frost seeding grasses and clovers to enhance his forage field to gain profitability.

A properly prepared seed bed is worked well and is firmed with a culti-packer or other tillage tool that will firm the soil. A good test of whether your soil is firm enough is by walking through the field! If the heel of your boot is leaving more than ¼" of an imprint then you should take one more trip over the field to make it firmer. Even if you are using a Brillion-type seeder you still need to have a good, firm seed bed prepared. Don't just count on your seeder to give you the firmness you need. If you are 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 ¼-3/8" deep. This will be attained by properly setting your drill and sowing into a firm, moist but not wet seedbed.

Frost seeding in late February to early March is a common practice for establishing legumes into an existing pasture. Some producers also frost seed ryegrass or festuloliums into existing pastures. One of the keys to success for this area is to control the growth of the crop that you frost seed into. Grazing or clipping existing pastures when they reach 8-10" down to 4-5" will allow sunlight to reach the new seedlings. Many species can be frost seeded but the greatest success will be found with ryegrass, festuloliums, and clovers because they establish quickly. This practice generally works well, especially if spring weather conditions are moist and cool. In warmer and drier than normal springs the seedlings will not be as vigorous and will often not establish as well.

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