

Considerations for Alfalfa Management

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Managing alfalfa for a successful crop should be assessed based on specific needs for feed and nutritional quality. Product selection is one component to help create a successful crop. However, management decisions are key to enhancing the selected product, as well as understanding what is needed to maintain an alfalfa field or to plant a new crop. Consider these tips to help assess your field and management decisions:

- Alfalfa stands can be damaged by cold winters, spring frosts, during the reestablishment of fall seeded alfalfa, and normal spring regrowth if the plants have not built up enough carbohydrates in their root systems.
- Evaluating an alfalfa stand will help you understand and set yield expectations and determine if you will need supplemental forage. Newly seeded crops should have at least 20 plants/ft², while existing stands should have at least 12 plants/ft².
- Look at individual plants for browning, decay, slow bud growth, and yellowing. Evaluate the root system, especially the tap root for decay, brown spots, dark spots, discoloration, and stringy roots. Healthy roots should be solid and have a white pith. Look for thin stands and continue to monitor fields.

If planting a new alfalfa crop, assess needs and manage your seeding:

- Take a soil test to assess nutrient needs, especially potassium.
- Select high-yielding products with good agronomic traits and disease tolerance, especially Aphanomyces 2 – a new disease in certain areas. Selecting products offering winter hardiness and fall dormancies for the field and geographic area based on the desired length of stand is important.
- Established crops should not be reseeded with alfalfa seed as autotoxicity can occur. New crop seedings should not be planted into a recent alfalfa field.
- Plant alfalfa into well-drained soils with a 6.5–7.0 pH and a firm seed bed at no more than ½" deep. Creating a well-established stand can help maintain longer-lasting production.
- Planting rates may vary, but shoot for 15–20 lbs/ac.
- Unless additional forage is needed early or winds are a problem, plant alfalfa directly without a cover crop.
- Managing weeds is very important, as weeds reduce yields and stand establishments very quickly. By planting a Roundup Ready alfalfa, you can maintain high yield potential with more options to manage weeds throughout the growing season.
- Planting alfalfa for quality vs. tonnage is determined mainly by management. But products such as HarvXtra, offering low lignin attributes, can reduce number of cuttings, maintain high yield potential, and add quality while reducing costs and labor.
- Planting alfalfa with a seed coating can offer benefits against early diseases and insects and also in establishing a stand in dry geographic fields and areas.

Ask your Monsanto agronomist or sales representative for more information about these management tips and products offering benefits in weed management and low lignin qualities.