

## Winter-Injured Alfalfa Stand Options

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**Pamper injured stands.** Delay first harvest and cut above any crown regrowth allowing stands to recover. High yield potential is critical to alfalfa economics and rotational benefits are huge. It rarely pays to keep sub-par stands (<40 stems/ft<sup>2</sup>).

**Manage injured stands inter-seeded with Italian ryegrass.** Don't expect a lot of ryegrass in the first cutting. Look for significant contribution to the second and later cuttings. Leave swaths as wide as possible to speed drying, or graze the field to avoid the costs, challenges, and losses of machine harvest and storage.

**Terminate weak stands after first cutting.** Plant a grass crop that can benefit from the N left behind by alfalfa. Options: corn for fall silage for maximum energy yield; sorghum-sudan, sudangrass, or hybrid pearl millet for multiple cuttings or grazings (less energy but greater CP than corn silage); or foxtail millet for a dependable, one-cut, moderate-quality forage within 60 days.

**Establish new alfalfa stands with high yield potential.** In northern Minnesota and Wisconsin, spring seedings can be successful up until June 1. If mid-summer moisture is adequate, August-seed new stands of winter-hardy alfalfa varieties. On sandy ground with adequate moisture, alfalfa can be August-seeded where it was winterkilled or terminated early this spring. Otherwise, the field should be left out of alfalfa for a full year.

**Seed alfalfa in mixtures.** Seeding legume-grass mixtures, particularly in fields with rolling topography, is less risky than seeding alfalfa alone. Grasses, in particular winter-hardy sod-formers (e.g., low-alkaloid reed canarygrass), provide protection and insurance against alfalfa heaving, ice damage, and cold exposure. Experiment on a small scale with different varieties and species.

**Evaluate harvest schedule.** One method to improve persistence is to allow at least one crop per year to become well flowered. Delay the fourth cutting until either 50% bloom or when 2-3 inches of regrowth has emerged from the crowns.

**Graze more.** Costs to harvest, store, feed, and haul manure continue to rise. With grazing, livestock do the harvesting and manure hauling, consuming more of the nutritious leaves than can be captured with machine harvest.

