



Alfalfa Seed Supply Tight; Time to Order Now

Brent Johnson, Syngenta Alfalfa

Industry representatives are encouraging growers to be proactive and order early to ensure they get the alfalfa varieties they want for the 2012 planting season. Tight seed supplies this year will mean the popular varieties will be first to go.

“Just like corn or soybeans, it’s best to order early to secure a supply of the varieties that you want,” says Brent Johnson, Syngenta Alfalfa Product Lead.

What’s causing tight supplies? Weather and lower alfalfa seed acres, explains Johnson. With unusual weather hitting the United States, production has been lagging, particularly where the majority of alfalfa seed acres are located.

“Cool, wet days are a challenge since alfalfa is bee-pollinated and bees prefer sunny, warm days,” he adds. “In general, the crop is shorter than anticipated. Additionally, the bloom was delayed due to the weather. It’s not like we’ll have an extra short crop, but we will see tight inventory for certain varieties.”

On the international front, seed production in Australia was hit with major floods this year. Ultimately, Australian alfalfa seed growers produced only 20% of the normal output.

“This will not necessarily impact the United States, but it does

cut short the worldwide supply of alfalfa seed,” says Johnson.

Another contributing factor to tight supplies is the decline in planted acres. Growers are seeing opportunities with other crops – whether they are cash crops or planted for seed. Producers will look at the price they can obtain for wheat while also factoring in the lower risk needed when compared to alfalfa and make the decision to switch acres.

“There’s less commitment when it comes to wheat and other crops in comparison to alfalfa,” he says. “The cost of bees and equipment is an investment and the cost is on the rise. Plus, producers need to commit that field to alfalfa for 3-5 years whereas wheat, corn and other seed crops can be moved annually.”

For example, Idaho farmers harvested 8,500 acres of alfalfa seed in 2010, a 23% decline from 2009, according to the Idaho field office of USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service. In 2004, Idaho farmers harvested 22,000 acres of alfalfa seed.

“High commodity prices that farmers receive today for corn, soybeans, and wheat are also driving up prices for seed production,” Johnson adds. “To stay competitive, new contracts for alfalfa seed

production need to reflect the higher incomes growers are able to achieve with higher commodity prices.”

Growers may also be concerned about the availability of glyphosate resistant alfalfa seed but ample supplies are available.

“There’s plenty of good quality seed of existing glyphosate tolerant varieties for growers to purchase,” Johnson states. “Syngenta will begin releasing new glyphosate tolerant varieties into the marketplace as early as the spring of 2012. Since full deregulation took place in early February 2011, it was too late to get new crop production seeded last spring.”

For more information about Syngenta alfalfa, contact your local Garst®, Golden Harvest® or NK® representative or log on to www.syngenta.com/alfalfa.

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