

NPFA UPDATE

SPRING '24

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE
NORTHERN PLAINS FORAGE ASSOCIATION

WHO ARE WE?

NPFA is a grassroots association open to forage growers, buyers, industry partners, and anyone with an interest in forages. We are creating a networking and education group focused on annual forages/cover crops, alfalfa, silage, grazing systems, and more!

IN THIS ISSUE

- Spring Stand Evaluation
- Alternative Forages-What to Consider First?
- Board Member Spotlight
- From the Board
- Associate Members
- Upcoming Events

WHERE TO FIND US



Email: npforage@gmail.com
Membership Sign-Up:
<https://sdstate.questionpro.com/NPFA>



SPRING STAND EVALUATION

By Justin Fruechte, Renovo Seed Director of Seed

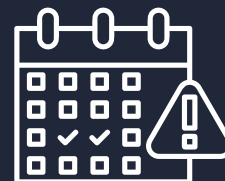
Spring is trying to start in most of the country. As the snow and ice melt it always gets me a bit nervous as to just what'll occur as brown plants break dormancy. Typically, with plenty of snow, little ice, and less open days with extreme wind; we don't see winter injury occur with grass and alfalfa. This year, I think we've had our fair share of ice across the upper plains, and it may be smart to evaluate some options if the fields don't green up like we hope.

It'd be extremely rare if we have a native stand or long lived pasture experience winter kill. But, what is vulnerable are our alfalfa and introduced grass stands. Grasses such as Orchardgrass, Tall Forage Fescue Perennial Ryegrass, Timothy, and Meadow Fescue have a reputation of thinning if winter conditions get too tough. It seems there are three ways to go about renovating these fields. The first, is that the injury to your field is so vast that you cut your losses and rotate out. On an alfalfa stand your nitrogen credits carry some weight headed into a corn crop this year so it's not a full loss...

STILL NEED TO RENEW YOUR DUES?

As a friendly reminder, please consider renewing your membership by paying your dues at

- PayPal-
https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=R8TMYK397MZFJ (please consider the 'include fees' option)
- Venmo-
<https://www.venmo.com/u/npforage> (please consider adding \$1.53 to your dues to help cover fees on regular memberships)
- Check- Make out to "Northern Plains Forage Association" and mail to: Northern Plains Forage Assn. c/o Sara Bauder, 41814 298th St. Tyndall, SD 57066



“SPRING STAND EVALUATION” CONT'D

The second scenario is that you have winter kill on an old stand with less than 5 plants per square foot but want to limp it along one more year. In this scenario you have a long list of annual forages to choose from. If you can get into the field early in the spring, a cool season grain such as forage oats and forage barley will really boost your early cuttings. Along with that, I'd plant Italian ryegrass. The Italian Ryegrass will ensure re-growth so that in every cutting of alfalfa you get some additional forage. If by chance, you take a first cutting and are extremely disappointed with the stand, there is a window to over seed in early June. At this point in the year take a look at Pearl or Japanese millet. They thrive in the heat and can grow extremely fast through the summer months before they die with the first frost.

The third scenario is your young field that has less than 15 plants per square foot, and you want to keep it in production. If the stand was planted 1 year prior, you have the opportunity to plant alfalfa into that stand. However, alfalfa does create an autotoxicity that prevents the germination and growth of other alfalfa plants around it. So, if the stand is older than a year, you'll need to look at perennial grasses or clovers for inter-seeding options. Improved varieties of Medium Red Clover have proved to be suitable for maintaining quality hay in alfalfa for 2-3 years. Persistent cool season perennial grasses should be used here, which includes Meadow Fescue, Orchardgrass, and Tall Forage Fescue.

You'll have the opportunity this spring to make sure your fields are as productive as possible. Don't let these fields turn into the old worn-out sod bound stands that never reach your expectations. Your punctual effort will pay off in bales produced.



NPFA BOARD MEMBERS



- President: David Elliot, Drumgoon Dairy, Lake Norden, SD
- Vice President: Jeff Jackson, Croplan Alfalfa and Forage Specialist/ forage producer
- Treasurer: Mark Rogen, Boadwine Farms, Baltic, SD
- Mike Bettel, Dellait Forage Consultant & Dairy Nutritionist
- Justin Fruechte, Renovo Seed, Director of Sales/ forage producer
- Paul Hahn, CHS Agronomy Sales Representative
- Eric Tieszen, producer, Canistota, SD
- Al Lenhart, KWS Cereals Regional Sales Rep/forage producer
- David Skaggs, Agrovive Biologicals, Dairy Product Manager
- Patrick Toomey, USDA NRCS MN Range Management Specialist

ALTERNATIVE FORAGES- WHAT TO CONSIDER FIRST?

by Sara Bauder, SDSU Extension Forage Field Specialist



Alternative forages, or “cover crops” can make fantastic feed, and sometimes a great alternative to row crops depending on your situation. Here’s some factors to consider before trying a new alternative forage:

1) **Herbicide history.** Before planting an alternative to your intended crop, consider your crop rotation as well as haying/chopping and grazing restrictions of herbicides previously applied; this includes herbicides applied in the previous growing season. For more considerations regarding herbicide carry-over click [here](#).

2) **Insurance and Farm Service Agency (FSA) Guidelines.** Be sure to check with your insurance agent and FSA representative on all details regarding the seeding of your cover crop or forage crop. Frequently asked questions and answers regarding insurance can be found on the [Risk Management Agency \(RMA\) website](#).

3) **Purpose.** Always begin with the end in mind. Livestock feed, soil health, weed suppression, nutrient capture, soil moisture management, additional harvested forage, and grazing may all be common reasons to plant a cover crop. Try focusing on your own objectives when creating a planting plan. The [SD NRCS Cover Crop page](#) lists common South Dakota cover crops and their purpose ratings, seeding rates, and seeding depths.

4) **Seed availability and price.** Each year, demand for annual forage/cover crop seed varies and some species may have risen in price due to demand. This is important to take into consideration before choosing a species or mix to plant. Although most producers want to keep costs low, do remember that forage crops and/or improved soil health comes at a price, and some investment will be necessary.

5) **Crop rotation.** Keep your previous crop and intended crop for 2023 in mind; it is generally recommended to plant cover crops of diverse growth habits that are complementary to the subsequent cash crops, i.e., primarily broadleaves prior to grass cash crops, and vice versa.

6) **Termination.** Many cover crops will winter kill or die after a late chopping. However, some species may survive the winter, such as cereal rye, winter wheat, triticale, etc. Some species such as vetch and Italian ryegrass can stay dormant for a prolonged period (hard seed) and germinate the following spring. This does not eliminate these crops as an option; it simply requires prompt spring attention and management as these species may be of great value to utilize excess moisture in a potentially wet spring.

7) **Weed Control.** When planting a diverse cover crop mix, it can be nearly impossible to chemically control weeds during the growth of the cover crop. If a mix is well planned and raised under ideal growing conditions, the cover crops can usually out-compete weeds. However, if particular weeds are a concern, control issues should be considered before selecting cover crops. A thorough burndown before planting also helps with weed suppression. Cereal/winter rye is known for its inherent allelopathic characteristics, i.e. its ability to suppress weeds by the production of biological chemical substrates that are harmful to other surrounding species. Other cool-season grasses and sprawling or more ground covering broadleaf crops (such as vetches, or radish and turnip) can also aid in weed suppression...

MEET THE BOARD

Al Lenhart

I grew up in Storm Lake, IA on a hog, row crop, and alfalfa operation. From a young age I have had vast opportunities to learn about different industries through internships and work experiences. But, by nature, I feel I was called to continue in the agricultural world. After high school, I pursued my Bachelors in Agriculture at SDSU where I not only completed my bachelors, but met my wife, Melinda. We now reside in Ostrander, MN with our 2 children, Emery and Haizley. I currently support our own small operation in grain and forage production, but I am also regional support for KWS Cereals USA, focusing on Hybrid Rye. My favorite forages are cereal forages and alfalfa. Family is very important to me, so any free time I do have typically entails activities with them. The time commitment of working in agriculture is very rewarding, but often limits my time with external hobbies. But, when there is a bit of time outside of our operation, work, and family, I thoroughly enjoy spending time hunting big game and varmints. I greatly appreciate being involved with the NPFA as it is a tremendous opportunity for me to not only develop personally, but be able to share some of the successes (and failures) I have had, that may help others develop as well. The networking capabilities from being a part of this association have helped me tremendously.



“ALTERNATIVE FORAGES, WHAT TO CONSIDER FIRST?” CONT'D

8) **Soil Fertility.** If a producer is intending to use cover crops as forage, applying lower rates of nitrogen at planting can be cost-effective in the end. Consider previous crop credits if legumes were planted, and current soil test levels. In many situations, low nitrogen application rates (30-60lbs/a) will provide considerable growth for cover crops (especially grasses); it is also important to apply the appropriate rate of nitrogen when planting for forage purposes to limit the level of possible plant tissue nitrate-N accumulation (should plants experience drought or other stresses). Check the [South Dakota Fertilizer Recommendations Guide](#) for suggested soil fertility guidelines for major South Dakota crops.

9) **Planting time.** As most cover crops are grown in blends, it is difficult to establish an exact seeding date based on individual crop species. However, there are suggested planting windows for crop types based on the proportion of different cover crops species in the blend. Warm season species (such as forage sorghums, sorghum-sudangrass, buckwheat, sunflower, teff grass, etc.) should ideally be planted from late spring into early summer. After the third week of July, as average daily temperatures tend to decrease due to lower nighttime temperatures, cool-season species (such as small grains, peas, clovers, vetch, and brassicas) are recommended instead. When planted within these suggested guidelines, cover crops should have ample growth time for forage harvest near or after September 1. Due to growth habit, some species in the mix may mature faster, which should not inhibit forage harvest.



10) **Silage/Forage considerations.** If corn silage is not an option, consider a couple close alternatives such as forage sorghum, or sorghum-sudangrass. In some studies, forage sorghum was ~85% the feed value of corn silage. Additional grain could be included in the diet to meet performance objectives compared to feeding corn silage. Sorghum-sudangrass with the Brown Mid Rib (BMR) trait may be slightly lower in energy content, but produces fiber digestibility similar to corn silage. Although forage sorghum can be an excellent feed alternative to corn, it generally has a short cutting window at mid to hard dough, and can be difficult to harvest at the proper moisture (62-72%), especially if the crop is direct cut (not wilted prior to chopping). In some cases, non-heading types will require a killing frost in order to get plants dry enough for ensiling, which causes quality losses. If forage sorghum is too wet at harvest, corn grain or other forage dry matter can be added to the pile or bunker. For more information regarding feeding sorghum or sudangrass forages visit [ISU's Alternative Annual Forages publication](#).

Although there are many factors to take into consideration, annual forages and cover crops can be an excellent tool to add forage to your rotation.

FROM THE BOARD

Feed the Farm too!

By Al Lenhart

No matter what type of livestock your raising, providing the best in many regards for those animals can have a major impact on their performance, right? To provide the best for that animal, we need to know many factors about the animal itself to take care of them. For example: With daily evaluation of that animal, we can identify if it is experiencing a limiting factor. Why do we identify this? Why do we check our livestock daily? Well, typically, it is for their development, productivity, health, safety, and comfort. At the end of the day, we as producers do everything in our power to provide for that animal. If that animal experiences a lack in any of these factors, what do we do? We investigate why, identify the cause, search for a resolution, act on that issue to resolve it.

Now, let's use this same mindset as an analogy to our farms or operations. Whether that is in livestock, grain, forage production, custom operations, etc. It holds the same principles. We want to take care of ourselves too, right? We want to provide the best for our farm or operation for continual growth and sustainability. By consistently reviewing and evaluating our farming practices can help support that.

Now, going out and changing anything and everything on our farms is typically not the best decision. But, knowing where your farm or operation sits, regarding all resources that involve decision making, is not only important for developing your operation, but for the long term profitability and sustainability of your operation as well. Let's identify what our goals are in the short and long term. Utilize our resources of education, associations, and direct contacts with people we trust within the industry to identify some current shortfalls and successes. By identifying these, we can then decipher what is and what is not possible to resolve or improve. Once we know what is possible, we can make smart decisions that support feeding the farm, no different than how we feed our livestock.



NPFA UPDATE

PAGE 5

MEET OUR 2024 ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Being a new, grassroots organization, we have relied heavily on sponsorships, goodwill, volunteers, and associate members. We would like to specifically recognize our associate members who have gone above and beyond to support the Northern Plains Forage Association in its infancy! If you would like to see your business or operation listed here- contact us!



UPCOMING REGIONAL FORAGE-RELATED EVENTS

- Plan Now or Pay Later Webinar for Ranchers; April 4, 7pm
- Regenerative Livestock Systems Symposium; April 5 @ UMN St. Paul
- Nebraska Grazing Tour; June 11 @ Anselmo, NE
- SD Grasslands Coalition Grazing Schools; June 11-13, July 23-25, Sept. 10-12 @ Wall, Summit, and Chamberlain, SD
- Hands-On Business Seminar for Young Adults; June 18-21 @ Burwell, NE
- UNL Corn Silage Conference; June 20 @ Mead, NE. Hybrid meeting style
- Summer Grazing School; June 25-27 @ Gordon, NE
- SD Grasslands Coalition Pasture Walk; June 25 @ Lowry, SD
- West River Soil Health School; June 26-27 @ Caputa, SD
- Dakota Lakes Research Farm Summer Field Day; June 28 @ Pierre, SD
- Southeast Research Farm Summer Field Day; July 9; @ Beresford, SD
- Mobridge Soil Health Event; July 11 @ Mobridge
- Forage Field Day (hosted by SDSU, UNL, NPFA, and I-29 Moo-U) ; Aug. 6 @ Haskell Ag Lab in Concord, NE. Watch next newsletter for more details

*This is the best list available at time of publication- if you would like a forage-related event listed here, please contact Sara Bauder at sara.bauder@sdstate.edu.