

Tough winter for alfalfa

This could be a tough winter for alfalfa in Kansas, especially on newly seeded stands. The two main concerns for alfalfa are winter kill and heaving, said Jim Shroyer, Kansas State University Research and Extension crop production specialist.

"There is a wide range of winter hardiness among alfalfa varieties. Some varieties may have suffered winter kill injury this winter, especially where the crop had no snow cover," Shroyer said.

As in wheat, winterkill in alfalfa occurs when the crown is frozen, he said.

"If the plants are damaged by winter kill, the taproot will turn soft and mushy. Producers should check for bud and new shoot vigor. Look for delayed green-up, lopsided crowns and uneven shoot growth. If you see any of these symptoms, check the taproots for firmness. Some plants may even begin to green up and then die. But plants that put out second leaves are probably fine," the agronomist said.

If some plants are injured and stands have been thinned, producers may wonder about thickening the stands. Shroyer advises caution.

"Interseeding alfalfa to thicken an alfalfa stand will generally not work. If the stand is one year or less old, new seedlings will generally come up and then be outcompeted by the survivors from last year. If large areas of a one-year-old field have been killed, those areas can be disked and then seeded. If the stand is two or more years old, interseeding alfalfa will not work because of allelopathic effects from the established plants," he said.

This winter could also result in a more common form of injury to alfalfa. As the soil freezes and thaws, alfalfa stands can be damaged by the heaving effect, Shroyer said.

"This winter has been cold enough to freeze the soil where it is not under snow cover. Soils with high levels of clay are especially prone to winter heaving," he said.

If heaving has occurred, dig up some plants to determine if the taproot is broken, he advised.

"Plants with broken taproots

may green up, but they perform poorly and eventually die. Slightly heaved plants can survive, but their longevity and productivity will be reduced. Crowns that heaved one inch or less are not as likely to have a broken taproot. With time, these plants can reposition themselves. Raised crowns are susceptible to weather and mechanical damage. Raise cutter bars to avoid damaging exposed crowns," he suggested.

Producers can start to evaluate the health of their alfalfa stands in March or April, as soon as the soil thaws, Shroyer said. "They should look at the crowns and roots. Buds should be firm, and white or pink in color if they have survived with good vigor. The bark of roots should not peel away easily when scratched with a thumbnail. When cut, the interior of healthy roots will be white or cream in color," he said.

When alfalfa growth reaches 4 to 6 inches, producers can use stems per square foot to assess density measure, he added. A density of 55 stems per square foot has good yield potential. There will probably be some yield loss with stem counts between 40 and 50 per square foot. Consider replacing the stand if there are less than 40 stems per square foot and the crown and root health is poor, he said.

K-State Horticultural Events Calendar

Kansas State University Research and Extension and/or its Extension Master Gardeners are participating in the following area and statewide horticultural events, available to all interested persons. For more information about these, as well as more localized events, check with your local K-State Research and Extension office.

- * Mar. 12 - Gathering for Gardeners - Hutchinson - 620-662-2371
- * Mar. 23 - Youth Lawn Mowing Clinic - Wichita - 316-660-0100
- * Mar. 24 - Vegetable Seminar - Kansas City, Kan. - 913-299-9300
- * Mar. 25-25 - K.C. Home and Garden Show - Kansas City, Mo. - 913-715-7000
- * Mar. 26 - Tree Festival - Wichita - 316-660-0100, ext. 0140
- * Apr. 2 - Grow Good Food Workshop - Wichita - 316-660-0100
- * Apr. 2-3 - Harvey County Home and Garden Show - Newton - 316-284-6930
- * July 28 - Bedding Plant and Flower Field Day - Olathe - 785-532-6173
- * July 30 - Olathe Horticultural Center Open House - Olathe - 785-532-6173
- * Aug. 4 - Turf and Ornamentals Field Day - Olathe - 785-532-6173
- * Aug. 31 - Horticulture Night - Colby - 785-532-6173
- * Sept. 1 - Horticulture Night - Hays - 785-532-6173

Kansas State University Research and Extension is offering the following area and statewide agricultural conferences and field days to all interested persons. For more information about these, as well as more localized events, check with your local K-State Research and Extension office.

- * March 12 - Junior Swine Producer Day - Manhattan - 785-532-1264
- * March 26 - Kansas Junior Meat Goat Producer Day - Manhattan - 785-532-1264
- * April 16 - High Plains Horseman's Day - Oakley - 785-460-4582
- * June 8-11 - Animal Sciences Leadership Academy - Manhattan - 785-532-1264
- * August 18-19 - Risk and Profit Conference - Manhattan - 785-532-1504



Understanding Crop Rotation

Though it's easy for suburbanites or city dwellers to go months, if not years, without seeing a farm, the most recent agriculture census for which information is available notes that in 2007 there were 2.1 million farms in the United States. Those farms spanned 922 million acres, shedding light on the fact that while many Americans might not see farms on a daily basis, that doesn't mean the country isn't still a great home to farmland.

While farming might once have been a part of most Americans' daily lives, today the principles of farming are much more foreign to the average American. One such principle is crop rotation, a valuable agricultural practice that can even pay dividends for suburban homeowners who enjoy gardening. The benefits of crop rotation aren't only applicable to large farms, as they can help keep personal gardens healthy as well.

What Is Crop Rotation?
Crop rotation is a practice farm-

ers employ to help their crops fight disease. By growing a variety of crops in a sequential system throughout their field, farmers are hoping to avoid the buildup of disease and pests that is common with mono-cropping, which is the practice of growing the same crop on the same land year after year. When rotating crops, each succeeding crop must belong to a family different from the previous crop.

Why Employ Crop Rotation?

Crop rotation has many benefits, arguably the most important of which is keeping pests and disease at bay. Since many pest insects and disease-causing organisms are host specific, rotating crops helps ensure these insect pests and harmful organisms cannot make a permanent home or have access to a permanent source of food. If crops aren't rotated, then the insect pests and organisms have a constant source of food, enabling them to live longer and do more damage to crops as a result.

But crop rotation isn't only beneficial to crops. Crop rotation can also promote healthy soil. Different crops have different nutrient needs, so rotating crops with different nutrient needs helps avoid the depletion of any one element present in the soil. Soil structure is often better when crops are rotated as well. Some crops are deep-rooting while others are shallow rooting. By alternating between the two, planters can break up any subsoil that might have grown compacted.

Crop rotation also offers environmental and financial benefits by reducing reliance on synthetic chemicals to fight pests. By rotating crops, planters are making it much harder for pests to thrive, without having to spend money on costly and often environmentally harmful pesticides.

Many occupational hazards face farm workers

Many occupations are hazardous, few more so than agricultural labor. Farmers recognize that they must be diligent in their efforts to prevent nonfatal and fatal injuries.

According to the most recent statistics, farmers face a fatality rate of 25.1 for every 100,000 workers. In 2008, 456 farmers and farm workers lost their lives to work-related injuries. What's particularly risky about agricultural work is that it tends to be a family profession. That puts all members of the family at risk for injury. On average, 113 youth under the age of 20 die annually from farm-related injuries.

Tractor rollover injuries, inhalation of chemical pesticides and

lacerations from farm equipment top the list of prime agriculture-related occupational injuries. With scores of different mechanical equipment and chemicals, not to mention lengthy exposure to the elements on a normal working day, the risk of injury is considerable.

There are key ways to prevent injuries on the farm. Here are a few considerations.

- * Proper training of new employees on the use of required equipment is essential. If certification is needed, be sure employees have been trained and practice on equipment prior to independent use. Safety gear should be used at all times, when required. Workers should be careful to keep hair tied

back to prevent entanglement in equipment.

* Care should be used when working in the elements. Workers should be properly dressed for the temperature and conditions. Beverage breaks should be taken so that dehydration is not a risk.

* Knowledge of chemical pesticides and fertilizers should be fully understood. Safety equipment, such as ventilators, eye guards and gloves, should be used when handling caustic chemicals.

* Machinery should be maintained according to OSHA and other federal guidelines. Equipment in good working order is less likely to cause injury.

* Caution should always be used around livestock.

* Operating equipment when impaired is a hazard in any profession. Alcohol and drug use do not mix in a farm setting. Individuals who seem intoxicated should not be allowed to work.

* Children and adolescents should be carefully monitored around the farm. Because of their developing bodies, youngsters should not be allowed to do any activity that is overly strenuous and might tax growing bodies, such as heavy lifting.

* There should be training in general first aid and CPR so that help can be given to an injured worker before a response team is able to make it to the location.

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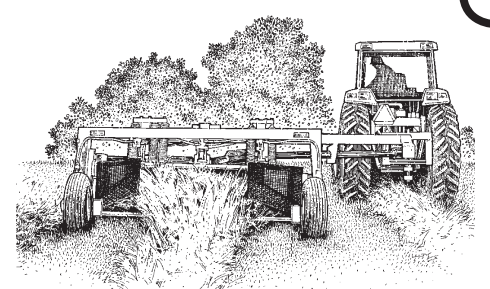


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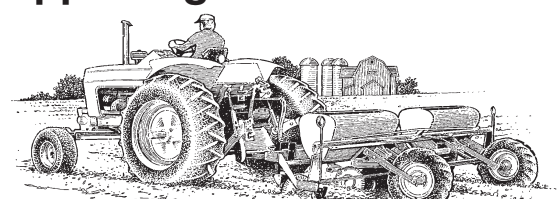
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