



ADVANCED AG SYSTEMS'

Crop Soil News

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"It is the crops
that feed the
cows that make
the milk
which creates
the money."

Advanced Ag Systems
Research, Education, Consulting

Short on Forage: Make Decisions NOW!

A drought will scare a farmer to death, a flood will starve him to death. This is an old saying that accurately indicates the impact of wet weather. With last year we need to redefine wet for a number of areas for how deep the water was on the field. In the worse areas farms are short or potentially short on forage. For emergency forage, **decisions need to be made NOW.** **Schedule SOON a detail meeting with your nutritionist** to see exactly how much forage you will have and how far it will go with your rations. Make adjustments now and develop contingency plans for this next season.

Last year many found to their dismay that seed types and varieties they wanted for emergency forage were extremely short or completely not available. The northern areas are last to plant and tons of emergency annuals were already sold and planted earlier on acreage to the south that had their own problems with weather. If this weren't bad enough, this year many seed companies had significant issues producing seed. BMR sorghums and sorghum-Sudans – traditional emergency forages - were completely sold out last year so there is no carryover. Adding to the problem, bad weather hit at sorghum harvest and so supplies of certain varieties will be problematic even before the increased demand hits from northern farms short on forage. Short season corn – popular for an early crop to offset dwindling forage supplies- is grown in the same area that many acres were under water. Oats produced for this spring planting was sucked up and used to produce a late season emergency forage last fall. Red Clover and cool season grasses were also hit by weather and will be short. You need to sit down and detail out what is on each field now and get your orders placed if you have any hope to get the seed you want. **YOU SNOOZE, YOU LOSE.**

What are the fastest crops to grow in 2019?

The earliest crop will be winter forage. Fertilized as we discussed in the [March 2019 Newsletter](#), and harvested at flag leaf stage, 2 – 4+ tons of dry matter/acre can be added to the feed supply before the leaves are even on the trees. Unfortunately, many winter forage acres still had corn on them and so were not been able to be planted, or went in very late, due to the weather and the corn silage still on the field. Later planted will still give you a crop but yields will be down.

Right after winter forage harvest (literally within a day or two) comes the **cool season grasses.** Fertilized with nitrogen and sulfur, they will take advantage of the cool moist conditions and can produce high yields of quality forage that can sustain top milk production. **Most farms do not harvest grasses in time for top dairy forage.** Dr. Cherney's work has found that stands of nearly all grass will be ready to harvest when your alfalfa is only 13 inches tall (when dandelions turn white). Immediately re-topdress after first cutting to take advantage of the cool spring/early summer weather and get another harvest of milk quality forage in June before the hot weather hits. For rapid regrowth, **each cutting of grass needs the cutter bar set at 4 inches.** Cutting closer than that will devastate the next cutting grass stand and yield.

Haylage cut on time is the third earliest crop. Wide swath for same day haylage can boost the energy 17% over next day haylage, giving you more milk producing nutrients in every ton harvested.

Forage oats planted alone will be the next early harvested crop. It can be no-tilled incredibly early into previous year's corn providing it was not a rutted mess. Either the grain type or the slightly later, but higher yielding forage type, can give you high quality. Harvested at boot stage will enable you to come right back in and no-till a sorghum-Sudan or short season sorghum for a summer double crop production.

Legume seedings with forage oats are the next yield boost. This is not always the preferred method for seedings, but seeding with an oat nurse crop will give you several tons/acre of high quality forage cut at boot stage in late June. I would suggest setting the cutter bar height at 4 inches to leave as many leaves and re-growth points on the alfalfa /clover under-crop. What you potentially lose in oat forage you gain in new seed-ing growth.

A number of farms are thinking of planting BMR sorghum Sudan, or Sudangrass as emergency forage for an early harvest. I suggest you come in after early planted forage oats so you don't lose one to two months of early growing season as all sorghum species need WARM soil with increasing soil temperatures. Ignore this temperature requirement and the crop will not emerge nor grow. For northern NY by the Canadian border we have had to delay planting for soils to warm until the 22 of June on some years and still had over 20 tons silage/A. Thus, we suggest double crop with an early oat. Caution: the detailed management for success with a wet forage, plus the lack of proper planting/harvesting equipment, and dealing with a new crop - sorghum - that you have limited experience with, may is not be what you want to chance where you need sure success. We strongly suggest a one cut system for the sorghum-Sudans and the forage sorghum as it will produce at least double the total yield of a multi cut while simultaneously maintaining forage quality and cutting harvest cost in half per ton. This will be discussed more in the February letter.

For most farms, a very early planting of a slightly higher population short season corn (if you can get seed) will be the least risk option. Corn can grow at soil temperature of 55 F. so you can maximize the season. No-till would be even better because you don't have to wait for the whole soil profile to dry, just the top 4 – 5 inches. We have no-till planted 82 day corn the end of April at Albany, NY and had mature 18 tons/acre corn silage by the first of August. Utilizing minimum tillage we have come back in and established legume grass seedings for the next year harvest. (note: dry or very cloudy weather can delay maturity of the early short sea-son corn, thus endangering the success of the following seeding if it is not planted on time).

An alternative with short season corn August 1 harvest is instead of seeding, follow with manure im-mediately incorporated and then plant 100 lbs. oats (grain type - not forage oats) and 80 lbs of triticale /acre. The oats will be harvested at boot stage the end of September. If you mow it correctly – cutter bar height at 4 inches, the triticale will rapidly regrow and give you an additional harvest next spring. Mow shorter than that and you will have a bare field with no winter forage. Thus, from the same acre you get a corn silage crop, an oat forage crop, and a winter forage crop the next spring.

If you don't want the winter forage advantage you can plant just oats. In our trial, just oats planted in early August, with oat seeding rates not showing any significant increase in yield above the 100 lbs./acre rate. For our trial with winter triticale where we took the oats at boot stage, we applied 11,000 gal/acre of manure and immediately incorporated it. I have seen samples harvested on time with wide swath same day haylage saving the sugars, and the test showed protein was 20.4%, the NEL was .74, and the sugars were 15.7%. Us-ing a homolactic bacteria inoculant our research has found that with these high sugar levels you can get complete fermentation without butyric issues on this wet forage.

Sincerely,



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Hand
to Better
Agriculture**

