

Options if there are Poor Forage Stands in 2019

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There are concerns that our forage crops may not survive the 2018-2019 winter conditions and some stands may have winter injury or death. If that is the case what are our options for the 2019 growing season? First, evaluate the stand. On new alfalfa seedings from 2018 there should be a minimum of 10 live plants per square foot with a minimum of 4-5 stems. A stand with less than these minimums may not be profitable. Dig up some plants, if the root is creamy colored the root is alive and healthy, if it is brown, black, or mushy the root is diseased or dead. If roots show disease signs they may die during the season. Many times depending on spring growing conditions you may have to wait until early to mid-May to determine if the forage crop will be viable. Older stands you will need a minimum of 4-5 crowns and once the alfalfa begins to grow there should be a minimum of 40 stems. If these are grass stands you need to determine if the grass has survived winter and will grow. Grasses are susceptible to winter injury and death just as legumes.

Second, autotoxicity to alfalfa should not be a problem if it was seeded in 2018. Alfalfa can be replanted in this field in 2019. If the field was planted prior to 2018 then rotating to another crop is the best option. Interseeding or frost seeding may not deliver the results you will need to cover your forage requirements and sometimes it is better to rotate to another crop rather than interseed. Remember that interseeded crop is competing with the existing stand and may not get enough light or nutrients to establish and provide adequate forage. This may work some years, but may not be a first option.

Third, what are your forage requirements? Determine your forage requirement for the livestock you are producing. Know both the quality and quantity of forage you will need. Early in the growing season you have

many options, but if a decision is made after mid-June your options are limited.

After you evaluate the stand and you determine to replant the field to alfalfa, it could be direct seeded or a cereal or cereal-pea cover crop can be used to provide additional forage. If hay is not a concern rotating to corn silage may return the greatest dry matter yield per acre for the season. Early decisions allow flexibility in selecting a crop to be planted if the forage crop is determined to not be profitable.

You evaluate the stand and the decision is to leave the stand. Now, after first crop you determine the stand is not economical. Corn silage is a viable option and provides the greatest dry matter yield when planted into July. If it is the 1st week of June reseeding and it was a 2018 seeding, option one above, may still be a viable. Sudan grass or sorghum-sudan grass hybrids would be another option, but require warm soil temperatures (>60 degrees F) and warm weather to provide an economical yield. This option should be considered around mid-July, however most years yields will be less than that of planting corn silage in June or early in July. Sudan mix yields are variable in central Wisconsin, good yields in hot/dry growing seasons and low yields in cool/wet growing seasons.

If there is a need for emergency forage as August approaches a cereal grain or a cereal-pea mix can be planted and forage harvested in October. This option provides good yields and quality as the late summer seeding of small grains doesn't mature as quickly as spring seeded small grain.

Remember the most important step in this process is evaluating stand as soon as conditions in the field permit. Then depending on the forage requirements for the farm develop a crop plan for the season. This plan may change as quickly as weather, but a plan is better than no plan at all.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Options</u>	<u>Comments</u>
June 1	Corn silage, small grains/peas under-seeded, soybean	Corn silage will provide greatest DM tons/acre
July 1	Corn silage, soybean, sorghum/sudan hybrid, millets	BMR sorghum/sudan provides better quality, crop requires warm temperatures
August 1	August is a good month to seed small grains for emergency forage, fall brassicas	Adequate GDD to produce a few tons DM with small grains and brassicas
September 1	Fall seeded winter small grains, if planting following corn silage harvest	Review herbicide labels, may not be legal to use as a spring forage
October 1	Cover crops or for spring forage	Roots help soil life and capture excessive nutrients protect soil, review herbicide labels