



4 Steps to Ensuring Forage Stand Success

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For a great alfalfa field, you need successful stand establishment. This starts with proper site selection and seedbed preparation.

When a forage stand fails, it's expensive. It costs more money to reseed the stand and results in lost production. Before planting alfalfa, grass, or other forages this spring, take the steps needed to provide the best chance for successful establishment.

The following steps may vary a little from farm to farm and field to field, but will apply to most fields:

1. First, make sure the field is suitable for whatever you intend to plant. Seeding alfalfa in an area that frequently gets flooded or has standing water is not likely to produce long-term success. Next, soil test and add recommended fertilizer before planting.
2. Next is one of the most important steps: Prepare a firm seedbed. Walk across the field before planting. You should sink no deeper than the soles of your shoes or boots. Bounce a basketball on your seedbed. If the ball won't bounce back up, your seedbed is too soft. Firm it up with a harrow or roller.
3. One of the most common causes of poor forage stands are planting too deep. Most forage seeds are very small and should be planted no more than one-fourth to one-half inch deep on heavy or fine textured soils or one-half to one inch deep on sands or coarse textured soils.
4. Lastly, control weeds. Tillage during seedbed preparation, burn down herbicides before planting, post emergence herbicides (choices here are limited), and even mowing are all possible methods.

Remember that even if you do everything right Mother Nature may still throw you a curve ball. MASC does offer Forage Establishment Insurance for just such curve balls, talk to your agent to see if it fits your needs:

https://www.masc.mb.ca/masc.nsf/program_forage_establishment.html

Below are a couple of good sources of additional information that may help to ensure the success of your forage establishment.

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/production/forages/tips-for-improving-forage-establishment-success.html>

<http://www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca/Default.aspx?DN=dee67693-7baa-4c62-a567-1ed13397472e>