

CORNER POST

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WHEN YIELD AND QUALITY MATTER®

SPRING FORAGE DECISION MAKING TIPS

Now more than ever, producers are looking to augment their hay supply. We continue to see pressing forage needs across the country, along with dwindling inventory in areas affected by the long winter. Based on recent questions from the field, below are considerations when choosing to use both fall-seeded and spring-seeded forages.

- **If the crop to be harvested is already growing, be ready - small grains progress quickly.** As soil temperatures warm, small grains and cool-season grasses develop at a rate that can put larger acre growers in a difficult position. Most cereals take about 3-4 weeks to mature from boot to dough stage.
- **When planting small grains in spring (including alongside a spring legume), recognize that earlier plantings create more tonnage** (assuming ample soil moisture is available). Keep seeding rates high for grains planted alone (usually more than 80 lbs./acre) and even higher when seeded with peas (100+ lbs./acre total between grain and peas). The rule of thumb is 3-4 pea plants per sq. ft.

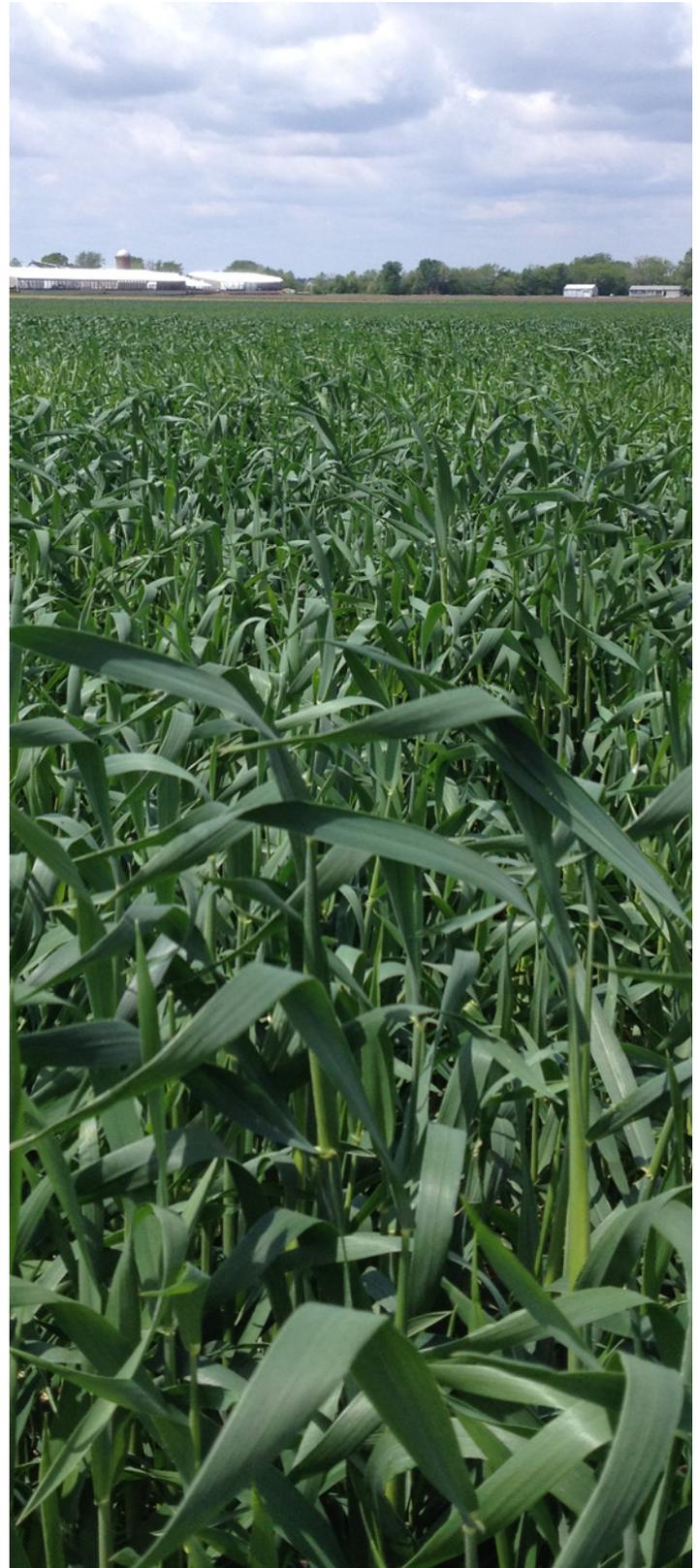


WHETHER FALL OR SPRING, COUNTING PLANTS AND STEMS IS AN EXERCISE EVERY PRODUCER SHOULD UNDERSTAND.

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- **Since small grains make up a large percent of fall and spring seedings, their value in a ration is different than most traditional options** (like alfalfa or corn silage). Where alfalfa provides protein and corn silage produces starch, small grains don't necessarily check either of those boxes. Cereals deliver biomass; even more when allowed to grow to heading. Follow these tips:
 - » Harvest at boot stage (or late vegetative stage) to maximize both tonnage and quality
 - » If harvesting for silage, harvest as soon as heads appear (or soft dough) to provide some level of starch
- **For silage with any forage, aim for 65% moisture.** Wilting challenges are lessened with wider windrows. Forages that are too dry are more difficult to pack and ensile. If too wet, palatability is decreased. Fill the silo or bunker as quickly as possible.
- **Don't forget about nitrate levels!** While high yields demand N applications (60-120 lbs. actual N/acre), consider split N applications to decrease nitrate accumulation (don't overlook winter manure applications). Follow these tips:
 - » **Wait 3 weeks to graze pasture after fertilizer application** to reduce the nitrate risk when cool-season perennial grasses are used
 - » Understand nitrates are concentrated more in the lower stalk, so **raising cutting height can reduce risk**. Never turn hungry livestock into forages that could possibly be high in nitrates.
 - » **Get hay tested if there is any concern**, and test standing forage for several weeks until levels subside. If hay is high in nitrate, feed in combination with very low protein forages (high C:N crops), or other hay low in nitrates. Ensiling the crop allows elevated levels to gradually subside.
- **Define your objective first.** If a spring planting is needed, select options based on the type of forage required. If hay or haylage is short, consider planting [alfalfa](#) or other perennial options now so the same scenario can be avoided. Interseeding into damaged stands is one way to extend fields and supply a quicker turnaround for feed. If a stand is only one cutting away from termination, consider how many weeks this could delay an alternative crop from being planted in that same field and maximized later in the year.



About The Corner Post

The Corner Post is a periodic email series with timely forage tips from the agronomic experts at Forage First and La Crosse Seed. If you have a question you'd like us to answer, contact us: info@laxseed.com or 800.356.7333

