

## APPLYING MANURE BEFORE SEEDING ALFALFA

Where do you spread manure? What crops benefit most from manure application? One good choice is a field about to be seeded to alfalfa.

Applying manure before seeding alfalfa may seem counter productive since alfalfa is not likely to benefit from the nitrogen in the manure. But manure also is rich in phosphorus, potassium, sulfur, and many micronutrients that alfalfa needs in large quantities.

Research studies show that applying as much as 12,000 gallons or 50 tons of dry manure per acre before planting alfalfa can boost alfalfa yield more than commercial fertilizers at the same nutrient levels. And, yield increases occur on both low and high fertility soils with manure. Sometimes higher fertility soils do not respond to commercial fertilizer. Other factors like improved soil tilth, increased soil microbial activity, micronutrients, and early nitrogen availability may be the reason manure increases alfalfa yield so well.

Do not heavily apply manure prior to alfalfa seeding if you also plant a companion crop like oats that you plan to harvest for grain. It is likely to lodge and smother much alfalfa. If you cut the companion crop early for hay, though, it will be alright.

Use a soil test and a manure test to determine how much manure to apply. Then mix manure well into the soil using tillage, making sure to prepare a firm seedbed so new alfalfa seedlings will emerge rapidly and vigorously. Also, plan your weed control program carefully since manure can also stimulate weed seedlings. Proper timing of seeding, firm seedbeds, and herbicides or clipping can control weed pressure.

Looking for a place to spread manure? A heavy dose before planting alfalfa can pay big dividends.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
314 Keim Hall—East Campus  
Lincoln NE 68583-0915  
402-4742-2577  
[banderson1@unl.edu](mailto:banderson1@unl.edu)

