

July 2017

REPLACE THINNING ALFALFA FIELDS

The past few years have been tough on alfalfa fields. Some alfalfa plants that have managed to survive the harsh conditions are showing the accumulated effects of all that stress. Add in the stress from harvest plus any insect damage or leaf diseases and plants that were old or weak starting out this spring may simply have too much root disease and not enough healthy root to keep going.

Now is a good time to check fields to learn if they need to be replaced, either with a new seeding this August or next spring. If weeds are becoming a problem, that is usually a good indication that the stand is getting thin and needs replacement. And don't forget, after alfalfa you can reduce nitrogen on next year's crop by at least 100 pounds per acre.

Older, dryland fields with less than 25 shoots per square foot coming from 2 or 3 plants should be replaced. Very productive sites, such as irrigated and sub-irrigated fields, should have over 40 shoots per square foot coming from 4 to 6 plants.

Also dig up and look at some roots. Healthy roots are solid and white, with a firm texture. A little browning in the top couple inches of the crown may not be much of a problem yet, but it could develop into a serious disease in another year or two. Roots that are discolored in a third to one-half of the tissue might survive this coming winter, but these plants will not yield well next year. If crowns and taproots show extensive brownish discoloration or are becoming mushy and partly rotted, these plants probably won't survive another winter.

Observe and anticipate declining alfalfa stands. Then you can replace them on your terms instead of Mother Nature's.

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