

April 2014

WINTERKILLED ALFALFA MOST COMMON THIS SPRING

Have you checked your alfalfa stands carefully yet? If not, what are you waiting for? They may need attention.

Scattered reports are beginning to come in from throughout Nebraska regarding the condition of alfalfa stands. And the results have been highly variable. Fields side by side with supposedly similar varieties, cultural practices, and harvest management have had greatly different outcomes. There also has been more within field variation than usual.

As you remember, winter was cold, dry, and windy with very little snow protection. These are dangerous conditions for alfalfa and some places had severe losses. For example, many of my alfalfa variety test plots near Lincoln died over winter. Interestingly, there was little or no injury to plots planted last year but alfalfa planted in 2011 or earlier was nearly wiped out. It is important to note that our last harvest was in mid-October. Many of the fields with stand loss reported to me also were harvested late, but not all of them.

I have been taking last alfalfa harvests in mid- to late October for over thirty years. This is after what is believed to be the prime winterizing period of mid-September to mid-October. We have never suffered much stand loss before. But under the right, or maybe I should say wrong, weather conditions almost any management can fail.

In a week or two I will evaluate stands more closely to see if any varietal differences exist, but don't you wait that long. Check your alfalfa today if you haven't already done so. I don't want you to complain later that if you had known your alfalfa stand was so bad you would have planted it to corn and started a new alfalfa field.

It was a tough winter for many alfalfa fields. Check today to see how well your fields survived.

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