

Adding Legumes to Existing Forage Stands

Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs)

Integrating legumes into existing tame forage stands is a valuable practice for producers aiming to enhance the nutritional quality of forage, improve soil fertility, and promote sustainable agricultural systems. Legumes, such as clover and alfalfa, bring numerous benefits to both livestock and the overall health of the farming operation.

Perennial legumes (e.g., alfalfa) can be established in tame pasture or hay fields using application methods, such as drilling, broadcasting, or mixing seed in with minerals for distribution by livestock.

Note: You may wish to consult an accredited technical advisor (e.g. Professional Agrologist, P.Ag or Certified Crop Advisor, CCA) to develop or support your management plans.

Management Benefits

Increased Nutritional Value

- Legumes are rich in protein and can add to the nutritional content and digestibility of forage.
- Enhanced protein levels contribute to improved animal growth, reproduction, and milk production.
- Legumes complement grasses by providing a diverse nutrient profile, including essential vitamins and minerals.
- Increased palatability and digestibility of forage promotes better feed utilization by livestock.

Nitrogen Capture

- Legumes are able to fix atmospheric nitrogen, enriching the soil with this essential nutrient.
- Nitrogen fixing legumes can help reduce dependence on synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, leading to cost savings and environmental benefits.

Drought Resistance

- Many legumes, like alfalfa, have deep taproots that access water in lower soil layers, contributing to drought resistance.
- Deep root systems contribute to the resilience of forage stands during periods of water scarcity.

Weed Suppression

- Dense legume stands can suppress the growth of weeds, reducing the need for herbicides and enhancing overall pasture health.

Key Considerations

Species Selection

- Choose legume species that are well-adapted to the local climate, soil type, and management practices.
- Consider a mix of legumes to address a specific variety of nutritional profiles.

Establishment Considerations

- Ensure proper seed-to-soil contact and optimal conditions for germination.

Forage Management

- Adjust grazing or cutting practices to suit the growth patterns and needs of both grasses and legumes.
- Implement rotational grazing to prevent overgrazing and promote legume persistence.

Soil Testing and Fertility

- Conduct soil tests to assess nutrient levels and pH before introducing legumes.
- Adjust fertilization practices based on the nutrient requirements of pasture species.

Monitor for Persistence

- Regularly assess legume stand persistence and health, especially during the establishment phase.
- Address issues promptly, such as pest infestations or competition with grasses.

Start a Project Today

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