

Converting Annual Cropland to Native or Tame Forages

Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs)



The conversion of cropland into native or tame forages is a sustainable agricultural practice that offers numerous environmental, economic, and ecological benefits. This practice reduces inputs, such as fertilizer and fuel in areas of marginal return, reduces erosion, and increases soil carbon. RALP provides additional support for **conversion to native forages** because they can be more costly and difficult to establish.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT NATIVE OR TAME FORAGES

- Seed land to forages that was previously covered by annual crop.
- Consider including livestock management practices, including perimeter fencing and watering systems.
- Soil testing can improve management and outcomes.
- If warranted and backed up by soil testing, you may apply ag lime.
- An inoculant may be used to improve germination rates.

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

Soil Health Improvement

- Diverse forage species enhance soil structure, reduce erosion, and contribute to overall soil health.
- Increased organic matter content and improved nutrient cycling.

Water Quality and Conservation

- Forages help filter and retain water, reducing runoff and improving water quality.
- Deep-rooted forages support groundwater recharge and reduce the risk of water contamination.

Biodiversity Enhancement

- Native forages support a diverse range of plant and animal species.
- Helps form a balanced and resilient ecosystem.

Reduced Input Costs

- Forages typically require fewer inputs (e.g. fertilizers and pesticides) compared to annual crops.
- Lower operational costs contribute to increased profitability.
- Integration of forages allows for diversified farming enterprises, such as livestock grazing or hay production.

Key Considerations

Site Assessment

- Conduct a thorough assessment of soil types, climate, and water availability.
- Identify native forage species adapted to the local conditions or choose appropriate tame forages.

Species Selection

- Select forage species based on their adaptability, nutritional content, and compatibility with the intended use, e.g. grazing and hay production.
- Consider a mix of grasses, legumes, and other forbs.

Crop Rotation and Transition Period

- Plan for a gradual transition to forages, incorporating them into crop rotation cycles.
- Allow a transition period to establish the forage, manage weeds, and optimize soil fertility.

Weed Control Strategies

- Implement effective weed control measures during the establishment phase.
- Cover crops or smother crops can suppress weed competition.

Infrastructure Investment

- Invest in necessary infrastructure, such as fencing and watering systems..
- Plan for efficient rotational grazing/harvesting systems.

Regular Monitoring

- Monitor forage stand health, weed presence, and soil conditions regularly.
- Adjust management practices based on observed performance.

Start a Project Today

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