

Get started now on planning fall alfalfa

NEWARK, DEL. — Farmers who intend to plant alfalfa this fall should already be making plans for this crop. Alfalfa isn't cheap to plant, and since it will be in place for five or more years, things need to be done right at the start for it to do well, says University of Delaware extension agent Dean Belt.

The first step is to get a soil sample right now. This will show what the soil needs and will have a major impact on how the crop is established. The pH should be at 6.8 to 7.0 at planting. If the field requires more than 1 ton of lime per acre on a sandy soil or 2 tons per acre on fine textured soils, consider plowing down half of the lime and disking in the other half. If the pH is below 5.5 delay planting until it can be raised.

The field selected must be well drained as alfalfa will not tolerate any wet areas. The crop has high phosphorus and potash requirements and needs about 2 pounds of boron a year. Here again, Belt says, a soil test is a must in order to know how much to apply at planting or for maintenance.

Planting date is critical. Alfalfa should be planted in late August or early September, the agent says. Plantings after September 10th in New Castle County, Delaware are subject to more winter damage than earlier ones. For this reason it pays to plan ahead so everything is ready when seeding time arrives.

Alfalfa can be sown with a no-till drill or planted the conventional way. No-till requires even more preparation and planning than traditional methods. It's necessary to work well in advance of planting to have the pH up to recommended levels since large amounts of lime can't be worked into the soil without tillage. Also the field must be as smooth as possible.

Weed control can be accomplished with burn-down chemicals; however, if perennials are a problem, Belt advises getting them under control before attempting to no-till alfalfa. Conventional tillage allows growers the option of incorporating an herbicide like Eptam, Balan or Tolban. These must be worked into the soil immediately, following label directions for timing and depth. These products cannot be used for alfalfa-grass mixtures.

Growers who intend to establish their alfalfa with a no-till drill must start with a clean, weed-free field. Grain stubble is an excellent cover for this tillage method, the agent says. He suggests farmers interested in establishing no-till alfalfa obtain a copy of "Guidelines for No-Tillage Establishment of Alfalfa." This extension fact sheet comes from the University of Maryland. In Delaware copies are available from county extension offices in Newark, Dover and Georgetown.

When planting alfalfa by any

method, don't forget the inoculant. "Nothing is more discouraging than having a nice stand of alfalfa that starts to show nitrogen deficiency symptoms," says Belt. "Dr. Ed Jones, the agronomist for Delaware State College, often points out that inoculants are living organisms and must be handled carefully to ensure their effectiveness at planting. Heat will kill them, so don't leave the package on the dash of your pickup or in a hot shed. Store packages of alfalfa inoculant in the refrigerator until you're ready to use them. Use a commercial inoculant sticker or make your own."

Dr. Les Vough, extension forage specialist with the University of Maryland, has had success using sugar water and cornstarch as a sticker, Belt says. Here's the procedure he recommends.

Use at least two cups of sugar per quart of water, thoroughly moisten the seed, and then add 16 ounces of inoculum per 20 pounds of seed. This is more than most people are putting on, but remember the purpose of inoculation is to increase the number of rhizobia per seed so enough will survive for effective nodule development even under adverse conditions.

With more favorable seeding conditions and good soil moisture in the seedbed, the amount of inoculum can be reduced. Add the cornstarch after thoroughly mixing the inoculant with the seed. The cornstarch will prevent the seeds from clumping and permit immediate planting. It also will provide some nutrients for the rhizobia.

Recent research has shown that Furadan 15G applied at the rate of

6.7 pounds per acre in the row is very effective for insect control on alfalfa seedlings. Belt says this should be applied through a separate box if possible, or mixed thoroughly with the seed if the drill has only one box. To be effective, the Furadan must be covered with soil. Follow all label precautions when handling and mixing this or any other pesticide.

When planting, place the seed as shallowly as moisture conditions permit. In heavier soils 1/4 inch is usually sufficient. The main objective is to get good seed/soil contact. For best results a field should be out of alfalfa for at least two years before reseeded.

"Management is still the key to a successful alfalfa seeding," says Belt. "So take the time to have everything thought through and be ready to go when the planting season arrives."

Chester Co. to host Old Fiddler's Picnic



Pictured above, Master of Ceremonies Warren Mercer takes time out to greet park visitors at last year's Old Fiddler's Picnic. Mr. Mercer and hundreds of old-time musicians will return to Hibernia Park on Saturday, August 11, from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. for a day filled with music and fun.

Other activities will include a craft sale, hayrides, square dancing, and tours of historic Hibernia Mansion. A variety of good food will also be sold. The rain date for the event is Sunday, August 12.

Hibernia Park is located approximately four miles north of Coatesville, off Route 340 in Wagontown. For more information on the Old Fiddler's Picnic call the park office at 384-0290.

Cattle numbers decline

HARRISBURG — U.S. cattle and calf inventories on July 1 were estimated at 122 million head, down one percent from a year ago and two percent below July 1982, according to the Pennsylvania Crop and Livestock Reporting Service.

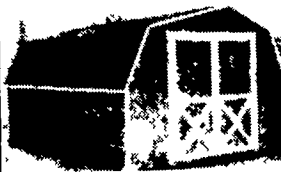
Cattle classes on July 1 and the change from one to two years earlier, respectively, are as follows: beef cows, 38.1 million, down one and two percent; milk cows, 10.9 million, down two percent from both years; heifers 500 pounds and over, 18.6 million, virtually unchanged from both years; beef replacement heifers, 5.60 million, down three and eight percent; milk replacement heifers, 4.95 million, up one and

four percent; other heifers; 80.5 million, up two and five percent; steers 500 pounds and over, 16.4 million, down three percent but up fractionally from July 1982; bulls 500 pounds and over, 2.50 million, down two and four percent; and calves under 500 pounds, 35.5 million, down one and three percent.

The 1984 calf crop is expected to be 43.4 million, down two percent from both 1982 and 1983.

This report provides United States estimates of mid-year cattle and calf inventories by classes. Individual state estimates are not available. The next cattle and calves report showing Pennsylvania inventory numbers will be included in the January 1, 1984 report.

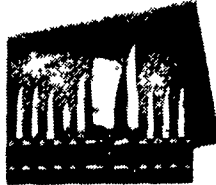
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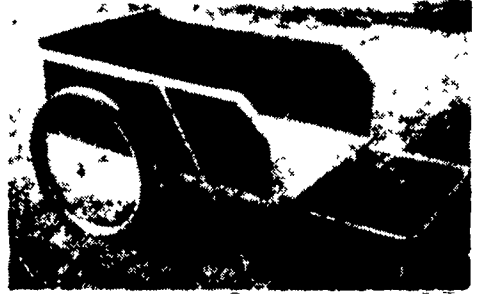
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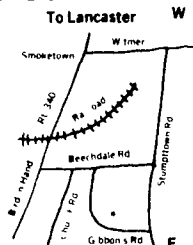
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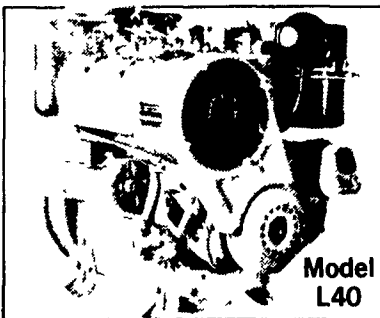
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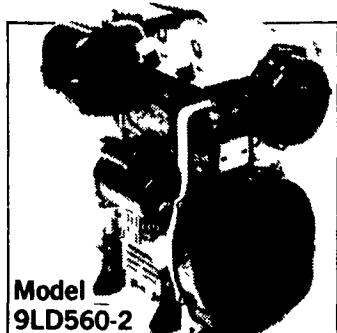


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