

Winter Activities Which Increase Forage Production And Make Life Less Stressful In The Spring

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As the snow blows and the thermometer dips below freezing, the last thing on most people's minds is making hay or grazing pastures.

However, now is an excellent time to complete a few tasks that could help you achieve maximum forage produc-

tion next summer.

During the spring, time is a very limited commodity with fields to be worked, crops to plant, and forages to be harvested. Shifting some of that work load to winter can improve the timeliness of completion and reduce your stress level in the spring.

Soil test and develop a fertilization plan. While ideally this should have

been done and some of the needed fertilizer added last fall, now is not too late.

Collecting the soil samples now will be a little more difficult than in the fall, but it is important to get the soil test information as soon as possible so that deficient nutrients can be applied in a timely manner. Develop a fertilization plan (including manure

application) that provides adequate nutrients when they are needed by the plant but does not over fertilize.

If you are going to be seeding forages this spring, now is the time to select and order a species and variety that will meet your needs and environmental constraints. To insure availability of the seed you want when you want it, *select and order now.*

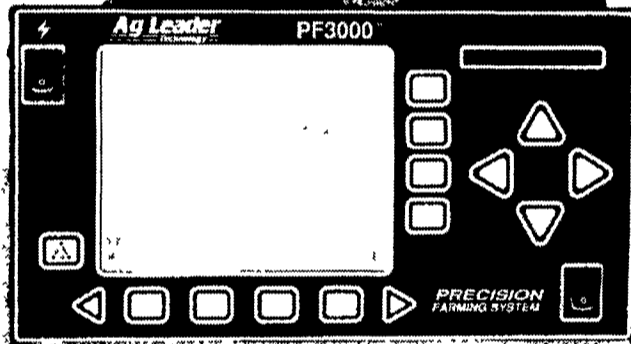
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If pasturing is a part of your forage system, construct new fences or repair and maintain existing fences. While this may be an impossible task with the winter weather, planning and ordering supplies now will speed up the task when the weather does break.

Repair and maintain forage harvesting and handling equipment. Nothing can be more frustrating than having equipment break down when work needs to be done. Granted, not all problems will be eliminated, but the potential for machinery problems can be minimized by inspecting and replacing worn or broken parts now.

Think about alternative options if some of your forage fields don't survive the winter. I realize that it is tempting fate to even mention it, but when you deal with a perennial crop such as forages, the possibility of winterkill is always present. A few minutes spent now thinking about different options and what if scenarios may save you some sleepless nights in April and make the forage portion of your farm operation run smoother next summer.



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