

# Capitol Region Agronomy Team Report



## SUCCESSFUL FORAGE CROP ESTABLISHMENT

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Thick, high-yielding stands of forage grasses and legumes depend on many factors, including fertility management, weed and insect control, species and variety selection, stand management, and probably

most important — successful stand establishment.

More often, mistakes made during establishment significantly hold back the potential yield of high-quality forage stands. Rarely can a new seeding be "thickened up" effectively.

Forage producers should consider all factors affecting successful stand establishment before pulling the seeder or drill out this spring.

Soil fertility management is a common mistake during stand establishment. For high yields of alfalfa, a soil pH of at least 6.7 to 6.9 is critical. Countless research and on-farm trials show the dramatic increases in yields and stand life when adequate levels of soil pH are maintained.

A soil test is the only way to accurately determine soil pH and fertility levels. Lime should be added six to 12 months prior to seeding because lime reacts slowly. Soil P and K levels also need to be monitored. Addition of fertilizers and/or manures must be made prior to seeding.

Poor weed control prior to seeding can drastically affect forage quality. Perennial weeds such as Canada thistle, quackgrass, and dandelion must be controlled. Often the best time to control these weeds is during the season prior to rotation to alfalfa or other forage crops. Many herbicide options exist for pure stands of alfalfa or grasses. Selection is reduced when legumes and grasses are mixed. Refer to the Penn State "Agronomy Guide" for control options.

Seedbed preparation is another important consideration. Conventional tilled seedbeds should provide a firm, smooth, clod free surface. Typically a drag-harrow produces a "loose" soil surface. In place of the harrow, use a cultipacker prior to seeding with a grain drill to ensure proper seed placement.

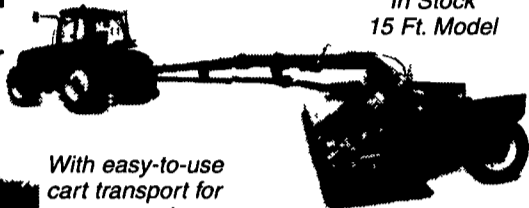
Take care to place forage grasses and legume seeds 1/4- to 1/2-inch deep. If placed too deep, the seeds will germinate,

(Turn to Page 6)

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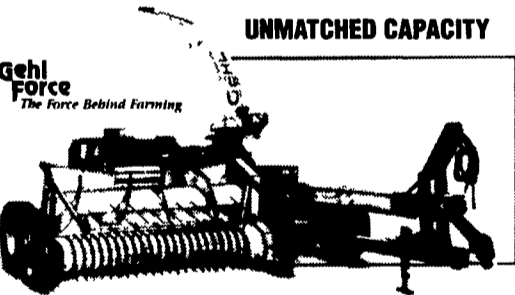
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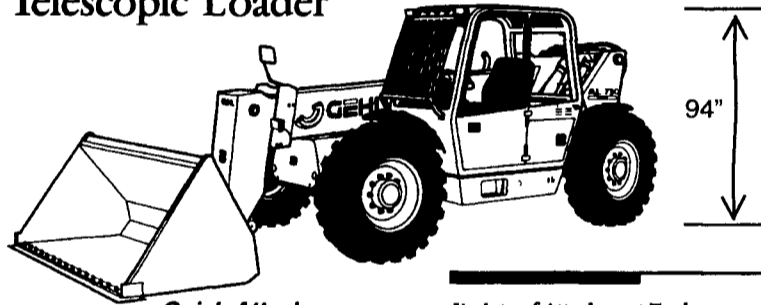
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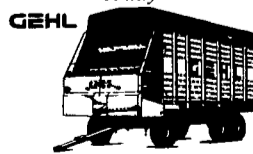
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