

Walk-in Seedings

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A “walk-in” seeding is a seeding method using grazing animals to establish legumes in a grass stand. It requires an adequate number of paddocks in a rotational grazing system to maintain proper control of the livestock for managing the stand. This management uses the grazing activity of the livestock to eat off the plant cover and uses their hoof action to walk the legume seeds into the soil. Then, by controlling the grazing activity of the livestock, competition from the established grasses can be controlled and allow the legume seedlings to become established.

Correct Soil Fertility and pH

Before using a walk-in seeding, soil test and apply the proper rates of phosphorus, potassium, and lime to meet the needs of the new seeding. For spring seedings, fertilizer and lime should be applied the previous year since it is difficult to get lime trucks out on wet fields in the spring.

Select the Forage Species for the Soil and Management to be Used

Select the legume species that are best adapted to the soil drainage and management to be used in the field. Improperly matching the legumes to the soil and management will result in the untimely death of the seeding. Legumes that establish easily using the walk-in method are red, ladino, and alsike clover. Most grasses do not establish well using this technique.

Control Plant Competition

There are two types of competition to a walk-in seeding, **perennial weeds** and **desirable forage grasses**. Remember that many so-called weeds are high-quality forage. When desiring to kill perennial weeds, use an appropriate systemic herbicide well enough before seeding to meet label restrictions. Competition to legume seedlings from grasses can be reduced by close grazing while walking in the seeds and after establishment to favor the legume over the grass. Do not use

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nitrogen fertilizer on grass-legume stands since it will cause the grass to shade out the legumes. If a major part of the stand consists of undesirable perennial weeds, consider using no-till or conventional tillage establishment.

Seed at Proper Rate and Depth Maintaining Good Seed-Soil Contact

Use certified seed of proven varieties to ensure clean seed with known performance. Seed red clover at a rate of 4-8 lbs/acre and ladino clover at 1-2 lbs/acre. Spread the seed over the pasture just before turning cattle or sheep into the paddock for grazing. Use the livestock to walk the seed into the soil surface, ensuring good seed to soil contact for germination. Adequate stock density is needed to get good hoof action. Use 30 mature cows with calves (about 40,000 lbs live weight) on one acre for a 24- hour period or on six acres for a 6- to 7-day period. Moist soil conditions during the grazing and after seeding are best for establishing a walk-in seeding. Due to the need for moisture these seedings are best done in early spring (March-May depending on elevation) or fall (August-September).

Manage Grazing and Mechanical Harvest to Maintain the Desired Plant Species

The main reason new seedings are lost is that they are not managed properly after establishment. Graze the field at the appropriate timing and intensity for the forage mixture seeded. Remember that before renovation, a pasture is in balance with the soil fertility and grazing management used. Without changing the grazing or fertility management, a new seeding will revert back to what was there before. For tall-grass pastures and hayfield aftermath, turn livestock in when the stand reaches an 8- to 12-inch height and allow the animals to graze the stand to a 2- to 4-inch height where they are actively grazing. Paddocks need to be small enough relative to the number of cattle so that this is done in 7 days or less. Then the cattle need to be moved to another paddock until the grass reaches the 8- to 12-inch height again.

Manage Soil Fertility to Maintain Forage Production

To maintain forage production, fertilizers should be applied to replace the phosphorus and potassium removed in the harvested forage. These fertilizers can be home-grown manure or purchased fertilizers and lime.

Walk-in seedings are a cost-effective means of establishing clovers in a grass pasture or hayfield. The use of certified seed of improved varieties coupled with good grazing and fertility management will ensure good establishment and production for years to come.