

# SEEDING DEPTH - CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUCCESS

Each spring, producers weigh many operational decisions – from marketing and budgeting to equipment and operating expenses. Planning for spring forage plantings is also needed (some years more than others), but understandably may not be top of mind.

## SEEDING DEPTH - CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUCCESS

A subject consistently mentioned is seeding depth. Soil variability and competition from other plants – desirable and undesirable – can place new seedlings in an uphill battle. It's critical that growers do everything possible to achieve proper planting depth. Here are 5 reminders to ensure proper seeding depth and maximum germination:

**1. Seeds of different sizes normally require different seeding depths.** Most forage grass and legume seeds are smaller, and require a shallow depth of 1/4" - 1/2". However, forage sorghum and small grains need to be planted deeper. Teff, for example, establishes best when seeded less than 1/8". Traditionally, seeding depth should be ~3-5 times the diameter of the seeds being sown.

**2. Soil texture impacts proper seeding depth** (i.e. sandier soils tolerate deeper seed placement). As a rule, the same orchardgrass planted at 3/8" on clay soils should be placed between 1/2" to 5/8" on sand. Emergence declines significantly if forage seeds are planted too deep, and seeds too shallow risk lack of moisture. Grasses and legumes seeded closer to the surface require rainfall or irrigation post seeding.

**3. When planting a mix of several species, find an appropriate seeding depth most acceptable for the seed sizes in the mix.** If this isn't possible, planting equipment with a separate seed box is needed. Again, moisture is key. If precipitation is expected, one could "cheat" by planting a mix with different seed sizes a little shallower. Conversely, small seeded species planted at depths needed by larger seeds will struggle to emerge.



**4. In uneven fields, consistent seeding depth is more challenging.** Drill/planter set up is key. On no-till drills, planting depths are adjusted by cutting depth of the rolling coulter in front of the drill. Normally, the coulter should cut/slice the soil twice as deep as the planned planting depth. On most drills, the disk openers and press wheels work in tandem to affect down pressure and proper seed depth. For rented equipment, this step is even more important. Ensure all rows are set up consistently across the tool bar.

**5. Each spring, a test run before tackling a larger area safeguards against errors.** Some even brightly spray paint some seed to start, making it easier to locate and check depth. Adjustments may be necessary along the way to make up for changes in moisture or soil type.