

MANAGE COVER CROPS TO MAXIMIZE CORN YIELD

SITUATION

Utilizing winter cover crops for hay and corn production allows you to realize soil conservation benefits while increasing dry matter production per acre. Proper [cover crop management](#) in the spring can ensure that the subsequent corn crop is successful as well.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- Soil type
- Length of growing season
- Timing of winter forage harvest
- Burndown herbicide application
- Corn hybrid selection
- Planter setup
- Fertility
- Pest management

ACTION PLAN

- 1. Choose the right fields.** It is important to balance the shortened growing season with the opportunity to harvest dry matter in early spring when planting double-crop corn after forages. This production system is common in areas where longer growing seasons allow delayed planting. In the North and at higher elevation, choose earlier-maturing hybrids. This might result in decreased yield potential. In a dry spring, water removal before forage harvest may limit moisture for the subsequent corn crop, especially in shallow or coarsely textured soils.
- 2. Determine proper harvest time for forage.** Harvest time and method depends on the type of winter forage. Harvesting when cereals or grasses are at boot stage, or alfalfa is in early bloom, maximizes yield and quality. However, earlier harvesting may be necessary to meet spring planting goals. Harvesting alfalfa for haylage or baleage is preferred over dry hay to reduce time in the field and increase harvest opportunities. Avoid harvesting in wet conditions to prevent soil compaction. If rotating out of alfalfa, select the stand that is the best candidate for replacement.
- 3. Apply burndown herbicide.** Using burndown herbicides to kill the winter forage is preferred over plowing to gain soil conservation benefits and reduce the amount of time between forage harvest and corn planting. The key to effective herbicide control is allowing the forage to regrow to approximately 6 to 8 inches before spraying. It is possible to delay spraying until after corn planting, but timing and herbicide choices become limited. Work with a local agronomic professional to develop a herbicide program that fits into your rotation.
- 4. Select the right [corn hybrid](#).** Depending on your location, it may be necessary to pick a shorter-maturity hybrid so blacklayer in grain and half milkline in silage are reached before fall frost. Early vigor and emergence are important in no-till situations. Insect pressure also should be considered. Hybrids with in-plant insect protection like [Herculex[®] Insect Protection](#) and [SmartStax[®]](#) reduce insect damage and can protect against insects like black cutworm. Work with a Mycogen Seeds representative to pick the hybrid that will perform the best in your area.
- 5. Ensure proper planter setup.** Most planters can easily manage planting into sod. Make sure row openers and closing wheels are functioning properly to ensure good seed to soil contact. Narrow press wheels and depth gauges are generally recommended to reduce depth control issues.
- 6. Monitor manure application.** Another benefit to the double-crop system is the ability to apply spring manure on an actively growing hay crop. Manure also can be applied after spring harvest as long as it does not interfere with corn planting. Be sure to adequately account for [nutrient credits](#) in the previous forage crop and manure applications.

SUMMARY

Choosing the right locations and hybrids can help you make the most out of double-cropping corn after winter forages. For more information, contact your local Mycogen Seeds customer agronomist or trusted agronomic adviser.

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