

Cover Crops

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Do you remember 25 years ago when reduced till and no till was starting to be really talked about? Everyone was curious about it but no one wanted to really admit it. There was so much uncertainty about what could be done, what couldn't be done and how so many parts of no till just totally broke with what we'd always done. Well, I think cover crops are at about that same stage right now. There's a lot of interest but nobody wants to admit that they are interested. There's always been concern about using up soil moisture with cover crops, but we're starting to see in drier climates than here that this isn't a problem. And I'm sure that there's more than a few producers that are thinking, that they may try 30 or 40 acres but it's going to be in that back field that isn't near any roads that no one will ever see. What I can tell you is that there are a lot of folks interested in cover crops. They are interested in what they can do to further reduce soil erosion. They are interested in how cover crops can trap nutrients, like nitrogen and hold it around for the next crop. There is interest in obtaining more and varied forage resources for livestock. There is interest in whether some of these cover crops can in fact help break up compaction. There is interest in just what cover crops will work around here given our conditions, our soils and our cropping history. There's enough interest that you may even start to see some test fields popping up. Stay tuned, stay receptive and never say never!

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Top dressing wheat

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With the exception of wheat that may be planted on sandy soils, I hope you've had your wheat topdressed by now. If not, you need to get on the stick and get that done. In general, we have been tardy in topdressing our wheat in the spring. Tiller number and head size is determined very early on. Wheat is just now starting to really come out of dormancy, but with warmer temperatures that we've had and that are forecast the wheat is going to be growing fast, and in fact the roots already are. There is still time to get nitrogen applied to influence head size. That occurs at Feekes growth state 5 which corresponds to about 2 weeks prior to jointing and we are a ways off from that, but not necessarily a long ways off. Part of the problem is that once you get the nitrogen fertilizer applied, it needs to be carried down into the root zone. This is going to take at least a quarter inch of liquid precipitation. Plants can take up a very limited amount of nitrogen through their leaves, but the majority needs to come out of the soil and through their roots. Rates are a challenge - in general we figure that every bushel of wheat is going to take about 2.4 pounds of nitrogen. Most people aren't going to apply that much N because we have residual in the soil, we have adjustments from previous crops and soil organic matter adjustments. But in general I feel that most wheat is under fertilized and I would like to see, in the absence of a soil test, a total of 100 to 125 pounds of nitrogen applied between starter and topdress. It may sound like a bunch, but unless you're content with 40 bu wheat, 60 lbs isn't enough any more! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk

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Spring planting of alfalfa

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. While we strongly encourage a late summer time frame for planting alfalfa, spring can work almost as well, but you need to start planning now. You need a soil test to make sure that the soil isn't too acid and to know your phosphorus and potassium levels. If phosphorus is low and/or you need to add lime to raise the soil pH, then you need to do it and incorporate it, especially the lime, before planting. If you don't need to add lime, then plan on planting no till or at least reduced till. Alfalfa seed is small and you need a fine firm seed bed to insure good seed to soil contact. You also want to seed into a weed free seed bed. Use glyphosate to burn down the weeds a week or so before seeding. While expensive, roundup ready alfalfa will make it very convenient to keep weeds under control in the seedling field. If you know that there may be some weed pressure, you may want to use one of the many preplant or pre-emerge herbicide options that are available. Seeding date for our area is going to be about April 20th to May 15th. If it's staying cooler than normal shoot for early May but if we get a warm up aim for the last ten days of April. Generally I recommend 12 to 16 pounds of pure live seed per acre and get it planted about 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep. Finally, make sure that the seed is inoculated even if alfalfa has been grown there in the past. It's a cheap addition and leaves nothing to chance. If you plant roundup ready alfalfa, make sure that you follow the directions regarding an early glyphosate treatment to make sure that the susceptible seedlings are taken out early! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.