Renovating Grass Sods

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RENOVATING GRASS SODS

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Legumes supply nitrogen to grass sods and improve the quality of the forage.

Moisture, temperature and light are the major factors that influence the success of a new stand. Early spring seedings (February and March) are generally more successful than late spring or late summer seedings.

Legumes usually disappear from a sod field before the grasses because of (1) need for lime, phosphorus and potassium, (2) disease and insect damage, (3) overgrazing, and (4) drought.

Four steps to establish legumes in grass sods:

1. Overgraze and Lime

Allow livestock to overgraze or mow close during the fall so that a disc can tear the sod more easily in renovation. Test the soil and apply lime immediately, but put on no fertilizer because it would revive the grass for spring competition in the new legume seeding.

2. Renovate

Use a disc or field cultivator to disturb the grass sod. Renovation is more successful if tillage is done from November through February. Don’t overwork the seedbed. Just disturb 50-60 percent of the grass for sowing clover and alfalfa. Leave the old sod litter on top. A rough seedbed absorbs moisture and prevents erosion. Adequate grass tillers and clumps continue to grow and there is no need to reseed the grass. Also, the old sod acts as a nurse crop and holds back weeds.

3. Seed and Fertilizer

Bandseed 10-12 pounds of certified alfalfa or red clover or 3/4-1 pound of Ladino per acre during late January, February or March. Apply the equivalent of 300 pounds of 0-20-20 fertilizer. Be sure to inoculate the seed. Do not apply nitrogen fertilizer.

4. Management

Graze the renovated field as soon as the sod will hold the cattle. This grass must be grazed or mowed to make renovation successful.

Remove the cattle when they begin to bite off the young legumes. Now is the time to top-dress with fertilizer and rest the pasture for 4 to 6 weeks.

Thereafter, mow or graze the field to best suit the legume that was seeded.