



## Winnebago County

University of Wisconsin-Extension  
625 E. County Road Y, Suite 600  
Oshkosh, WI 54901-8131  
920-232-1970  
920-424-1277 (fax)  
TDD Phone: 711 for Wisconsin Relay

## Cooperative Extension

Agriculture	(920) 232-1971
Community Development	(920) 232-1972
Family Living	(920) 232-1973
4-H Youth Development	(920) 232-1974

July 25, 2012

From: Nick Schneider, Winnebago County Agricultural Agent

### EMERGENCY FORAGE COVER CROP TIPS

At Farm Technology Days in New London, there were many interesting conversations in the cover crops garden. There are many reasons a farmer might consider planting cover crops. These reasons include reducing soil erosion, increasing soil health by encouraging earthworms and soil microorganisms, loosening soil through extensive root systems, suppressing weeds, fixing nitrogen for next year's crop, scavenging left over nutrients so they do not leach into groundwater, and providing additional forage. Regarding the last reason, many farmers are looking to grow new forage sources in anticipation of feed shortages.

Let us review some points to consider if you are going to plant cover crops for emergency forage:

1. Granted there is a drought this year, but statistically averaged, August has the most or second most monthly precipitation. Based on historic weather data, on August 1, 40% of Growing Degree Days and 30% of growing season precipitation remain.
2. Start sourcing seed. Based on conversations with seed sales representatives at Farm Technology Days, inventories of some cover crop species or specific varieties are running low.
3. Old standbys such as oat, oats/peas, or even barley (if oats are unavailable) are viable options for growing another 1 to 3 tons/acre dry matter this summer. Oat variety matters. There is a planting date interaction indicating value to selecting a forage type oat or at least a late maturing oat when the forage cover crop is planted during late summer. Research summaries by Coblenz and Bertram can be found online at: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/crops/uwforage/FocusonForage.htm>
4. Time has run out for planting new millet, sorghum, sudangrass, and sorghum-sudangrass fields. A few farmers planted these earlier in the year. They were a better fit when planting in late June or early July, but these plants grow slowly once temperatures drop in the fall. A Focus on Forage tip sheet can be found online at: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/crops/uwforage/SorghumsFOF.htm>
5. Forage radish and forage turnips are options for grazing livestock/heifers. There is enough time for establishment of the *Brassica* forages in August. Do not graze milking dairy cows on forage radish because of off-flavor milk concerns. Top growth and root size becomes smaller as these are planted later. Forage radish has grown very well planted after winter wheat; however, it struggles to develop a huge taproot when planted after corn silage harvest. These cover crops show considerable potential but this note is meant to remind growers to have realistic expectation about root size as planting is delayed after corn silage harvest. A tip sheet by Undersander can be found online at: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/forage/pubs/brassica.html>
6. Although too late now, red clover frost seeded into winter wheat can be alternative late season forage after wheat is harvested with the bonus of nitrogen fixation. This is a good option to keep in mind next year. A research summary by Stute and Shelly can be found online at: [http://ipcm.wisc.edu/download/pubsNM/RedClover\\_0109.pdf](http://ipcm.wisc.edu/download/pubsNM/RedClover_0109.pdf)
7. If your feed supply will be tight coming out of winter, you can plant winter rye after corn or soybeans for early harvest next spring. If you can't find winter rye seed, winter triticale and winter wheat are forage

options. This practice can cause delays in spring planting which has the potential to lead to yield reduction in the following crop. A research summary by Stute et al. can be found online at:

[http://ipcm.wisc.edu/download/pubsNM/Rye\\_090507\\_final.pdf](http://ipcm.wisc.edu/download/pubsNM/Rye_090507_final.pdf)

8. Mixtures provide both above and below ground diversity. There were four root towers at Farm Technology Days. The classic oat-pea mixture had the most dense root profile of the species planted into the root towers.

9. Alternative legumes including chickling vetch, hairy vetch, crimson clover, berseem clover, Austrian winter field pea, and Sunn hemp grew well with impressive root nodulation when planted on May 27. However, large amounts of feed tonnage are unlikely to accumulate from these plants after this point in the season. If new legumes are tried on your farm, please be sure to inoculate them with the correct *Rhizobium* inoculant.

10. Look back at the field's herbicide history. There may have been soil applied residual herbicides sprayed within the last two years that can create herbicide injury from persistence plus feeding the forage from fields with these residues may be an off-label use. UW Extension Publication A3646 [Pest Management in Wisconsin Field Crops](#) has a table that provides planting intervals for rotational crops.

11. Crop insurance policies and double cropping can create some problems. If crop insurance is not on the primary crop, then this issue may not be of concern. But if crop insurance policies are used, double cropping may put coverage in jeopardy. Follow up with the crop insurance provider.

12. Fertilizer can help push the growth of pastures and forage cover crops. In many cases, 40 to 60 pounds / acre nitrogen will increase yield when applied in August, with precipitation. Nitrogen rate should be adjusted to the needs of the plant species. UW Extension Publication A2809 [Nutrient Application Guidelines for Field, Vegetable, and Fruit Crops in Wisconsin](#) provides nutrient application guidance.