

Alfalfa is a great choice for pasture and hayfields in the Midwest. It offers great yields of high quality forage that is very nutrient rich and palatable. In addition, alfalfa can have great persistence when managed correctly. As alfalfa is a long term investment, it is important to choose the best variety for your situation when seeding, to maximize its performance and longevity!

There are many things to consider when choosing an alfalfa variety. Here are a few questions to ask yourself to determine what varieties are best suited for your operation:

## **1. How will we harvest this? Mechanically or will it ever be grazed?**

a. If grazing is likely to be a significant harvest method (more than once every couple years while the alfalfa is actively growing), consider using a **SUNKEN CROWN (SC)** variety that is more tolerant to traffic.

## **2. What is the soil texture and moisture of my field?**

a. Often forage fields are some of our marginal acres that can tend to have wet or dry spots. If your field has a lot of variability or has had problems keeping forages growing in the past, consider a **BRANCH ROOT (BR)** alfalfa. Branch Root alfalfa tends to perform better in wetter and tighter soils than what traditional tap rooted varieties have done. Some producers have found that mixing about a 1/3 rate of branch root alfalfa into their traditional variety has helped provide better establishment in some low performance areas, and increases overall field productivity.

i. For those really tricky spots (pivot corners, washed out areas, etc.) we expect to have a new **Falcata Alfalfa** available in 2026 or 2027; however, until then, a branch root variety is the best choice.

## **3. How many times do I plan to cut? How rigid is my cutting schedule?**

a. Knowing if you plan to take 2, 3, 4, or even 5 cuttings per year is important before seeding, as not all varieties can handle every management situation.

i. 2- 3 cuttings - there are a couple options for producers wishing to harvest two or three times. The first is to choose our **PREMIUM ECONOMY** alfalfa. It is a blend of a couple higher performing products, to help increase the flexibility while lowering the seeding cost. It can last several years, and provides good tonnage. Alternately, producers can consider an **EXTENDED QUALITY (EQ)** product for flexible harvest that maintains its quality even when there is not a rigorous cutting schedule.

ii. 3-4 cuttings - this tends to be the average for the Midwest, which means most varieties can handle this schedule pretty well! For those that are very quality focused (dairy, high end hay market, etc), an **EXTENDED QUALITY (EQ)** product may still be a good choice just to maximize palatability no matter what the weather does!

iii. 4-5 cuttings - for producers wanting to maximize the yield potential and get as many cuttings per year as possible, consider planting varieties that are specifically chosen for their rapid regrowth. By choosing a **QUICK-CUT (QC)** product that has great regrowth, you can narrow the amount of time between cuttings, allowing for more cuttings per year.

**4. Do I scout and treat alfalfa if needed between cuttings?**

a. If you are unable to scout your alfalfa (boots in the field) at least weekly during the season, it may be worth considering a defensive type alfalfa to help reduce potential insect or disease issues. LEAF HOPPER (LH) resistant varieties can offer good protection against potato leaf hoppers and either delay or reduce the need for an insecticide treatment. When choosing an alfalfa score, a higher DRI (disease-rating-index) score can help you to choose varieties with good agronomics, helping to reduce other potential in-season treatment requirements such as fungicide. For producers that are able to scout, LH may not be a need, as other varieties may be more palatable and offer better performance.

**5. Do I need herbicide control? Should I choose a Roundup Ready<sup>®</sup> variety?**

a. ROUNDUP READY<sup>®</sup> (RR)\*\* varieties are a good choice for producers that need weed control. However, the technology fees for these products add a significant cost, so it is important to make sure that the technology will truly be useful. When considering planting a Roundup Ready<sup>®</sup> variety, consider if the field truly has weed problems, or if it is pretty clean. Also, consider whether the weeds you are wanting to control are still susceptible to glyphosate. Many weeds have developed resistance and will not be controlled the way they were ten years ago. Other weed control methods such as mowing or trying to outcompete weeds with cool season grasses could be considered. While the use of glyphosate can still be beneficial in forage production, it is important to remember that only alfalfa is tolerant of glyphosate. All clovers and cool season grasses are susceptible, meaning that you will not be able to have other species in the field and spray without killing them. \*\*Always Read & Follow Label Instructions!

**6. Am I experienced at establishing alfalfa? Is my risk higher than normal?**

a. When choosing a variety, consider if the variety has any REPLANT COVERAGE (RP), and if that is something that is desired. Replant coverage typically adds a cost of a few dollars per acre, but can be good insurance to help offset part of the cost if you have to replant. If you are new to establishing alfalfa, or do not have equipment to create a great seed bed, having some replant coverage may be a good risk management tool. Other times that replant varieties should be strongly considered is at the very beginning or end of the seeding windows, when risk is higher (replant coverage will not help when product is seeded well outside a suggested seeding period). Replant can also be considered in periods of abnormal weather when conditions are less than ideal.

i. Replant claims must be submitted within 60 days of establishment or 90 days of seeding. Claims turned in after multiple harvests will be rejected. Once a claim is received, please allow a representative seven days to inspect the field prior to termination. Replant Covered products will reduce the price of replant seed by 50% of the original retail price. For Roundup Ready<sup>®</sup> varieties the technology fee will be omitted on replant.