



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Hardin County Extension News Release

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Get Ready to Plant

Hardin County - The weather outlook for our spring planting season is not encouraging, as it is expected to be wetter than normal again, although hopefully not as bad as 2019. The purpose of this article is to stimulate our planning and preparation now so we will be ready to take full advantage of what are expected to be very short and few windows of opportunity to be in the fields this spring. In this article, we focus on planting forage crops, but the process and many of the ideas will pertain to other spring field work activities.

Begin your planning by mentally walking through what you will do the day you plant. It might even help jog your thoughts to physically “walk through” those activities. List every single activity needed to get the whole job done. Then ask the question, “Which of these activities can I do today, or what can I do now that will make that activity go smoothly and efficiently on planting day?” Then start doing everything that is possible to do ahead of time, so that no time is wasted on the day you can get in the field.

Make sure your fuel supply is full and fill the tanks of all tractors that will be used. Service all tractors. Get any needed fertilizer on hand or order it to be spread as soon as the field is fit (hopefully you pulled a soil sample last fall, and if not, do it now and send to the lab). Calibrate the fertilizer spreader.

Buy the seed (including any companion crops you will use) and have it on the farm, if not done so already. Also buy inoculant if seed is not pre-inoculated. Service all tillage equipment that will be used and have it ready to go, including having it hooked up to the tractor if possible. Get the drill/planter out and service it so it is ready to go. Arrange for equipment you will rent or borrow.

Calibrate the drill to the desired seeding rate using the seed that will be planted and then don't touch the drill settings. Check seeding depth and adjust to the first crop you will be planting. Seeding depth will have to be fine-tuned to field conditions on the day of planting. If this is the first time using this planter or planter/tractor combination check for machine levelness. If contracting the planting, get agreements and expectations in place now.

Finally list the field work tasks that you need to do this spring when the weather and soils are fit, then prioritize them. Think through the tough choices you might have to make between competing activities. Think through contingency plans if each specific activity cannot be completed in a timely manner, or if it can't get done at all this spring because of wet weather. When the windows of opportunity are shorter than the list of work that can be accomplished, tough choices will have to be made.

For example, how do you prioritize planting forages versus manure spreading in the spring? It will likely depend on the specific situation. If the manure is stored in a lagoon, then when the lagoon is full, the manure must be pumped out and spread on the field rather than planting forages, so the forage planting might have to wait. But planting forages too late in the spring brings a lot of risk to stand establishment and low yields (maybe only one cutting).

In that case it might be better to plant a summer annual for a couple cuttings, then kill it and plant the perennial forages in August. But if the manure is dry pack, perhaps it is better to take those first days of field work to plant the perennial forage and spread the manure later. Thinking through these choices and establishing a game plan will help you be more efficient and not waste time in indecision or making a less than optimal choice for the situation.

We surely all hope for a better spring than in 2019, but climatologists are forecasting another challenging planting season. So, prepare as much as possible now so you can make good decisions when the time comes. You don't want to waste hours of potential field planting doing stuff you can do today. Try to be completely ready, as if you will be planting tomorrow morning...which we hope will be true one day very soon!

Article written by Mark Sulc, Jason Hartschuh, Rory Lewandowski-OSU Extension, Forages Team; edited by Mark Badertscher-OSU Extension, Hardin County.