

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Landowner _____

Growing Sweetclover in Conservation Farming**WHAT IS SWEETCLOVER?**

There are annual and biennial varieties of sweetclover. The annual clover is medium to tall, upright, warm season, and white or yellow blossomed. The biennial clover has both a white and yellow blossom varieties. Variety differences are in height, fineness of stems, and leafiness. They have a higher percentage of roots to topgrowth than annuals, and withstand lower temperatures after bud crown development. They also offer better possibilities to penetrate and open up the subsoil and compact layers.

WHERE TO GET HELP

For additional information, contact your local Natural Resource Conservation Service or your local Conservation District office.

APPLYING THE PRACTICE**ESTABLISHING SWEETCLOVER IN A CONSERVATION CROPPING SYSTEM:**

Soil Adaptation: Does best on well-drained, deep to moderately deep, fine-and medium-textured soils.

Seedbed Preparation: Seedbed should be well prepared and reasonably firm.

Fertilizer: Lime and phosphate requirements of sweetclover are high and should be applied according to technician's current recommendations. Lime should be worked into the soil 6 months prior to seeding. Broadcasting of phosphate is usually done during seedbed preparation.

PLANTING

Date: February 15 to April 30; September 1 to October 31.

Rate: 10 to 15 pounds of scarified seed per acre when planted alone. 5 to 10 pounds of scarified seed per acre when overseeded on small grain. When unscarified seed is used, heavier rates of seeding are advisable.

Method: Planting with grain drill or cultipacker with a small-seed attachment ordinarily give good stands. Seed can also be broadcast.

Depth: Ordinarily, best stands are obtained when seed is planted $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep in a firm, moist seedbed.

Inoculation: Inoculate seed with clover culture of bacteria; protect from sun, and plant immediately.

MAINTAINING THE PRACTICE

Hay: For best quality, mow hay just as first blooms appear. It is important that the hay is cured before baling.

Pasture: The first-year growth of sweetclover will usually provide grazing in late summer and early fall when supplemental pasture is needed. Second-year growth generally begins in March and will provide grazing until mid-June. Livestock will learn to like sweetclover if they are allowed to start grazing when the plants are 8 – 10 inches tall. Under continuous grazing, maintain a minimum average top growth of about 4 inches. When rotation grazing is practiced, the plant may be grazed to a minimum of 3 inches provided the grazing animals are removed soon after this degree of use is reached. The forage should be permitted to make a minimum average regrowth height of about 6 inches before the animals are returned to the field. Limit these minimum heights of grazing to the growing season when ample moisture and fertility are present to generate an adequate regrowth during the rest period. A forage height of 4 inches should be present at the time the plant normally becomes dormant or ceases to grow. May graze lightly during the hot, dry months when fertility and soil moisture are adequate to produce new growth.

Seed: Pasturing early in the spring of the second year often results in higher seed yields. Grazing reduces the size of plants and makes seed to prevent good regrowth and seed production. In harvesting, combine direct when the majority of seed is mature and before excessive shattering begins; spread seed for drying before storing. When threshing from a windrow by means of a rotary pick-up attachment, the crop should be mowed when about two-thirds of seed turn

brown. Mowing should be done in early morning when the crop is slightly damp and tough.

Soil Improvement: It is a high residue-producing crop that can be managed to return large amounts of organic material to the soil which improves soil tilth. Best results are obtained if the clover is turned under or cut into the surface with a disk when the maximum growth is made.

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