

Food Plot Establishment and Maintenance

Nebraska Conservation Planning Sheet 21 (May 2009)

Landuser: _____ OPID: _____ Date: _____
CRP Contract No./Revision No. : _____ Tract No. _____ Field No(s). _____

Option Selected (circle all that apply): ANNUAL ALTERNATED PERENNIAL

Note: Attach a map (aerial photo) of the habitat unit showing the food plot locations.

General Considerations for Use of Food Plots:

- Adequate wildlife cover for reproduction, escape, and thermal protection is usually more limiting than food. Ensure that adjacent lands provide suitable wildlife habitat prior to establishment of a food plot.
- Food plots may concentrate wildlife populations and facilitate higher predation rates, increased spread of disease, additional traffic mortality (near roads) and depredation on neighboring crops. Adapt the wildlife plan accordingly to minimize these impacts.
- It may be possible to leave small portions of cropland adjacent to permanent habitat (i.e. turn rows) unharvested in order to supply a reliable food source.



Criteria for Placement of Food Plots:

- Consider suitable soils (fertility, erosion potential, etc.) for desired growth and management of selected crops.
- Avoid locating in areas with a history of noxious or undesirable weeds.
- Use multiple, scattered food plots throughout the habitat unit rather than one large plot to distribute wildlife.
- Locate food plots within ¼ mile of good winter cover such as cattails, tall warm-season grasses or windbreaks.
- Place the food plot in locations where they will not be buried by excessive drifting snow.
- Configure food plots in blocks 100' wide or greater for best results. Minimum width of strips is 30 feet.

Requirements for Food Plots on Lands Enrolled into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP):

- Food plots may only be used in conjunction with the following CP practices: 1, 2, 3, 3A, 4D, 10, 11, and 25.
- Approval to abandon/relocate food plots must be obtained from the Farm Service Agency. The plot must be seeded to an approved permanent cover at the expense of the cooperator.

Annual and Alternated Food Plots – Description and Size Requirements:

Annual food plots are typically annual grains such as milo, corn, millet, sunflower, wheat, etc. planted every year. Alternated food plots are grains planted every other year on a portion of the acreage while allowing the other portion to remain idle and grow volunteer grain and wildlife-friendly annual weeds. The sites are rotated the next year. In Vegetative Zones I and II, it may be necessary to add a fallow year into the rotation to improve soil moisture.

- Minimum size of individual food plots is 0.25 acres with a maximum of 5.0 acres per habitat unit. Total acres of food plot should typically not exceed 5% of the habitat unit without adequate justification from a wildlife biologist.

Perennial Food Plots – Description and Size Requirements:

Perennial food plots are typically combinations of introduced legumes, native forbs, or in some cases, shrubs. (If food plot consists of shrubs, attach a NE-CPA-15 Tree Planting Plan to outline species and configuration.)

- A minimum of two species of legume or native forb should be used to provide diversity for wildlife.
- Minimum size of herbaceous, perennial food plots is 1.0 acre with a maximum of 5.0 acres per habitat unit unless deemed necessary by a wildlife biologist.

Target Wildlife Species: Upland Game Birds Big Game Songbirds Waterfowl Other: _____

Criteria for Selection of Crops for Food Plots:

- Mixtures of species with similar growth habits (planting dates, season of growth) should be used to add diversity.
- Short and tall species that resist lodging (milo, sorghums, etc.) can be used in combination to provide food and winter cover by creating a stand that will simulate a cattail marsh with overhead cover.
- Small grains may not be suitable for some wildlife species if they readily become buried by snow and ice.
- Winter annual small grains (i.e. winter wheat) will provide a food source during two seasons – green forage for big game and waterfowl during fall and winter; standing grain during the following fall and winter.
- Sweet clover can be alternated with small grain crops (i.e. oats) to provide suitable cover and fix nitrogen.

Table 1. Crops to be considered for use in food plots. Circle or highlight the selected crop(s) to be used.

Note: When seeded in combination, reduce seeding rate proportionately based on percentage of mix.

Annual Food Plot Options	Seeding Rate (lb per acre)	Seeding Dates	Perennial Food Plot Options	Seeding Rate (lb per acre)	Seeding Dates
Milo (Sorghum)	3 – 4	5/25 – 6/15	Alfalfa *	3.0 – 5.0	11/1 – 5/31
Forage Sorghum	3 – 4	5/25 – 6/15	Red Clover *	2.0 – 4.0	11/1 – 5/31
Corn	12 – 18	4/20 – 5/20	Ladino Clover *	0.5 – 1.0	11/1 – 5/31
Sunflower	2 – 4	5/25 – 6/15	White Clover *	0.5 – 1.0	11/1 – 5/31
Pearl Millet	5 – 15	5/20 – 6/10	Alsike Clover *	0.7 – 1.5	11/1 – 5/31
Proso Millet	5 – 15	5/20 – 6/10	Strawberry Clover *	1.5 – 3.0	11/1 – 5/31
Oats	40 – 60	3/10 – 4/10	Sweet Clover *	2.0 – 4.0	11/1 – 5/31
Winter Wheat or Rye	30 – 50	9/1 – 9/30	Canada Milkvetch	2.0 – 4.0	11/1 – 5/31
Spring Wheat	60 – 80	3/10 – 4/10	Maximilian Sunflower	1.0 – 2.0	11/1 – 5/31
Triticale (winter)	50 – 70	9/1 – 9/30	Showy Partidgepea	5.0 – 10.0	11/1 – 5/31
Other: (list)			Other: (list)		

* = Introduced legumes may also be seeded between 8/1 and 8/31 provided adequate fall moisture is expected.

Seeding Method: Plant/Drill Broadcast/Harrow-(increase seeding rate by 50%)

General Operation and Maintenance Requirements:

- Allow food plots to persist until April 1 to provide a reliable food supply during possible early spring blizzards.
- Manage weed competition to avoid excessive competition with the planted crop. Consider the benefits that many annual weeds provide to wildlife species and avoid treatment methods that result in total weed control.
- Protect food plots from unplanned haying or grazing. Use temporary fencing as needed to manage livestock.
- Control noxious weed species and obtain recommendations from local weed control authorities.
- Rejuvenate perennial, herbaceous food plots with periodic management and interseeding (burning, tillage, etc.) Refer to the Early Successional Habitat Development/Management for additional information.
- Monitor use levels of existing food plots to determine the need for larger food plots, if use is heavy, or the opportunity, if use is light, to leave portions of a food plot unplanted for one year using the alternated option.
- Ensure that management activities (i.e. knocking down crops) do not conflict with anti-baiting laws for hunting waterfowl. Consult with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine appropriate management techniques.

Additional Maintenance and Management Considerations: (i.e. fertilizer, weed control, crop rotation, etc.)

I (We) concur in the use of food plots as outlined in Nebraska Conservation Planning Sheet 21.

COOPERATOR (Producer):		Date:	
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NRCS Representative:		Date:	
FSA County Committee:		Date:	
NRD Representative:		Date:	