

# Wildlife Food Plots

Wisconsin Job Sheet 136



## Introduction

Wisconsin winters are hard on everyone. Some of the wildlife species that share our farms migrate to warmer climates for the winter, but many wildlife and song bird species must tolerate the frigid conditions. We can help these resident species survive our snowy winters by planting wildlife food plots. Food plots are annual or perennial plantings of grain, grass, forbs, or legumes to provide food for a variety of wildlife. They also add plant diversity and cover to the rural landscape and can serve as supplemental or emergency food supplies during extreme cold or snow. Without a reliable safe food source, even the best winter cover is useless to wildlife.

The most common grain used for food plots is corn, but many types of grain can be used, including sorghum, soybeans, millet, buckwheat, and sunflowers. Because a wide range of wildlife species can benefit from food plots, solid stands of a **single food source are not allowed**. A diversified planting will benefit a greater number of wildlife species during that period when existing food sources are scarce. Green growing plants are the choice for many wildlife species in the spring, for instance, but their preference changes to fruits and seeds in the fall and winter.

## Where to Plant

Food plots should be located on the least erodible areas of fields where soil erosion does not pose a problem. Establish food plots adjacent to or within ¼ mile of existing winter cover such as shrub swamps, cattail marshes, woodlots, wide shrubby fencerows, or dense warm season grass fields. Annual food plots should be located south and east sides of permanent cover to reduce snow drifting into

the plots. If adjacent cover is not available, snow drifting into food plots can be lessened by establishing snow traps.

## Size

Individual food plots are recommended to be a minimum of ¼ acre in size, but 1-2 acre plots are preferred. Plots larger than one acre are particularly necessary in areas of high deer/turkey densities to ensure adequate food persists for other target species throughout the winter.



## Shape

Block-shaped food patches are recommended over long linear patches because narrow patches fill with drifting snow, burying the grain. Consider a minimum width of 50 feet to help prevent snow drift issues.

## CRP Requirements

Producers awarded 5 points in N1b must be aware that, if accepted in CRP, food plots must be planted each year of the contract. Food plots must be identified on a site map and may not be moved without permission.

There is **no** CRP cost sharing for food plots.

CRP food plots are limited in size to 10% of the acres of a field not to exceed a maximum of five acres in any field, regardless of field size. Example: a 60-acre field is limited to no more than five acres of food plot.

NOTE: To provide more diversity, corn cannot exceed 50%, and forages cannot exceed 25% of any single CRP food plot.

If more than one food plot exists on a field, each individual site will be considered a separate food plot.

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## Other Requirements

No grain or crop residue is allowed to be removed from the field and the food plots must be protected from livestock grazing. With consistent use by wildlife, food plots will need to be planted annually. If food plots are relocated or discontinued, the site must be re-seeded to an approved cover.

## Conservation Reserve Program Food Plot Requirements

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**NOTE: To provide more diversity, corn cannot exceed 50%, and forages cannot exceed 25% of any single CRP food plot.**

If more than one food plot exists on a field, each individual site will be considered a separate food plot.

## Planting Information

Where appropriate, food plots should be planted on the contour and conservation tillage shall be used.

Apply the necessary fertilizer, according to soil test, to ensure establishment of the plot. In lieu of a soil test, apply 100-150 lb/acre. of starter fertilizer (9-24-24 or 15-30-30).

Planting dates: Sorghum requires warm soil for successful establishment; therefore, food plots containing sorghum should be planted in June. Reference Wisconsin Conservation Practice Standard, Conservation Cover (Code 327) for additional information.

Weed control may be necessary to reduce competition and ensure successful establishment. The presence of some weeds such as foxtail, smartweed, and ragweed actually benefit wildlife by providing higher protein and a greater number of seeds than domestic grain. Use approved chemicals according to label recommendations and/or use mechanical cultivation, as necessary. Rotating mixtures within the food plot is encouraged to provide diversity and assist in pest/weed control. Approved seeding rates are located in Table 1. Multiply the seed rate by the percent of the food plot to determine pounds of seed needed.

Remember, successful food plots require inputs, management, and attention to detail comparable to farming for crop production.



## Plantings and Mixes

TABLE 1	
Food Type Annual	Seeding Rate (lbs./acre)
Alfalfa <sup>1</sup>	12
Buckwheat	40
Clover, red <sup>1</sup>	10
Clover, alsike <sup>1</sup>	3
Clover, ladino <sup>1</sup>	3
Corn <sup>2</sup>	15
Forage Sorghum	12
German/Pearl Millet	8
Grain Sorghum (Milo)	12
Oats	40
Partridge Pea	10
Soybeans	45
Sunflowers	8
Wheat	50

<sup>1</sup>May not exceed 25% of any food plot.

<sup>2</sup>May not exceed 50% of any food plot. Corn planted by population will vary in weight. Planting population should not exceed 28,000 kernels per acre and 18,000 when interseeded with soybeans.

Perennial crops may remain as a food source for up to 3 years. They must be rotated within the food plot upon the new seeding year. Established perennials will be clipped before May 15th as maintenance to control weeds and invigorate stands.

Planning changes other than minor adjustments to the above seeding rates require prior approval from NRCS.

Seeding rates need to be increased by 25% if broadcast seeding.

Seeding rates may be adjusted to reflect planter settings if approved by a certified planner.



**Forage sorghum:** Planting outside rows on north and west sides of plot to forage sorghum as a snow catch is highly recommended. Plugging every other hole on the grain drill to get 12 to 14-inch spacing is recommended. Broadcasting the seed is another good option.

**Grain sorghum** provides food nearer to ground, which can cause problems in heavy snow conditions. Using short maturity sorghum varieties may ensure better grain production.

Grain and forage sorghum selected for food plots should be early maturing and stiff stalked varieties.

**Millets and buckwheat** can be broadcast then dragged. Millets and buckwheat should be planted inside the outer rows of forage sorghum or corn when possible to provide better cover and snow catch.

**Sunflowers** work best when planted with forage sorghum or corn. Broadcasting and dragging is an effective way to establish sunflowers

**Soybeans** may be planted in a food plot to add variety. Planting soybeans where snow is not drifting is also recommended. The soybeans can be planted using the corn planter with correct adjustments and running between the existing corn rows.

**Corn** cannot exceed 50% of the mixture. Corn varieties should mature in 95 days or less. It can be planted in the middle of the food plot and be surrounded by the remaining mixture.

**Forages** (clovers, alfalfa, winter wheat, etc.) cannot exceed 25% of the mixture.

A nurse crop of oats or spring rye can accompany the forage at a rate of one bushel/acre. Drilling is a good means to establish alfalfa and clover although broadcasting and dragging is also an option.

### Food Plot Diagram (years 1-3) (not to scale)

Sorghum (13%)	Forage (25%)
Corn (50%)	
Sorghum (12%)	



# Food Plot Mix Examples

## Example 1

25% Corn:  $15 \text{ lbs/acre} \times 25\% = 4 \text{ lbs/acre}$

25% Grain sorghum:  $12 \text{ lbs/acre} \times 25\% = 3 \text{ lbs/acre}$

25% Sunflowers:  $8 \text{ lbs/acre} \times 25\% = 2 \text{ lbs/acre}$

25% Buckwheat:  $40 \text{ lbs/acre} \times 25\% = 10 \text{ lbs/acre}$

## Example 2

50% Corn: 18,000 seeds/acre

50% Soybeans:  $45 \text{ lbs/acre} \times 50\% = 23 \text{ lbs/acre}$

Corn and soybeans may be planted together with planter adjustments.

Caution: Planting too much seed will make plants compete and reduce the amount of grain produced.

The seed mix examples above are the per-acre mixes. Multiply this by the food plot acres to obtain the amount of seed needed.

Custom Mixtures: Many conservation and wildlife organizations have seed mixes that provide an excellent winter food source. All custom mixes must be approved by an NRCS Biologist prior to planting.

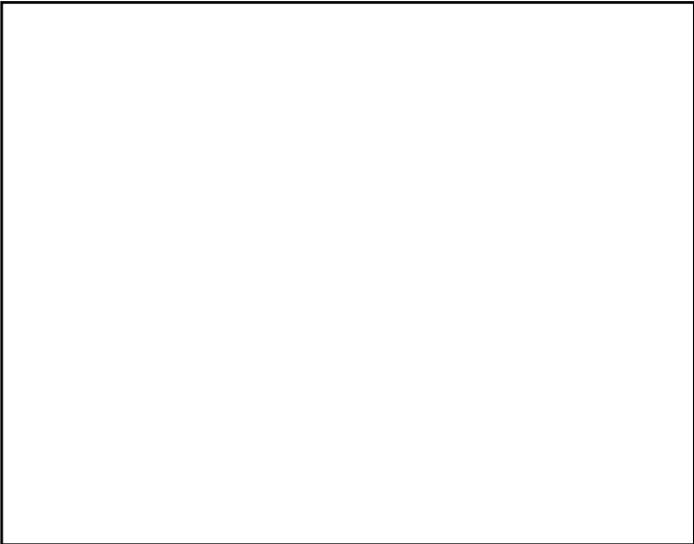


# Wildlife Food Plot (CP12) Plan

Landowner \_\_\_\_\_

SEED QUANTITY CALCULATIONS				
	Plot Number _____		Plot Number _____	
	Acres _____		Acres _____	
Species	Rate Per Acre	# Seed Needed	Rate Per Acre	# Seed Needed

## Site Map



Scheduled planting date \_\_\_\_\_

Total acres to be planted \_\_\_\_\_

Fertilizer \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Include a rotation on map if the food plot is moved*

Additional Specifications and Notes



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## Required Documentation and Verification

Practice amount applied is field verified by \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Before payment is made, the following information is required to be in the case file:

- Photographs of the established practice (must include:)
  - Statement "Photo was taken in the field by (enter name)"
  - Date photo was taken in the field
  - Statement of what the photo represents if it needs clarification
- Field verification is documented and a certified planner verified "as-installed" this practice meets NRCS standards and specifications.

### Practice Certification (NRCS USE ONLY)

I certify that the practice as-installed is complete and meets the applicable Wisconsin NRCS Conservation Practice Standard and all applicable practice specifications. Any changes to the original practice design have been approved and are documented on the original practice design "as-installed".

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Certified Planner (print) \_\_\_\_\_ (sign) \_\_\_\_\_ (date) \_\_\_\_\_

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