

Teff Management

The use of Teff appears to have leveled off in the Midwest. We think it will continue to be an important crop because of the opportunities it gives to produce dry hay from a warm season annual.

We have all heard the stories of Teff not growing and had farmers upset because of this failure. Some of these folks may not plant teff again, but for the producer who really needs to make hay in the summer, we don't need to shy away from recommending teff as a good option.

Even crops like corn and alfalfa fail on occasion and farmers still plant them without hesitation. When teff came to the forefront a few years ago, it was over promoted by the industry, Byron Seeds included. We were all told what a miracle crop this was and since it filled an important niche that we couldn't fill before, we all got excited by the potential and we left before we looked.

After several years of selling teff under our belts, we have a better handle on what makes stands fail and what it takes for them to succeed. Here are some of our observations:

- **Planting Depth:** This is the single biggest cause of seeding failure. The goal is 1/8" – 1/4" deep. If you plant any deeper than that and you will impact emergence. Remember the general rule about seeding depth being 5 times the seed diameter. Those teff seeds are tiny!
- **Firm Seedbed:** This goes along with planting depth. It is hard to only plant 1/8" deep in a fluffy seedbed. The seedbed needs to be at least as firm as if you were planting alfalfa. If you can't see the edge of the sole of your boot as you walk across the field, it is not firm enough.
- **Water:** Even though teff comes from the dry climate of Ethiopia, it still needs water to grow. This is especially true at planting time. Many teff stands have failed because they only got enough moisture to germinate and then withered up. Once well-established, teff is quite drought tolerant, but it needs a few summer rains to get to that point. Teff does not need inches and inches of rain though. Due to the shallow root system of teff it can take advantage of light rains that only moisten the top inch or two of soil.
- **Temperature:** Teff was originally sold as a warm season annual that could be planted at cooler temperatures than sorghum sudan and therefore could be planted earlier in the spring. We have found this not to be true. For best results, teff should be planted at soil temperature of 60 degrees and rising - the same temperature as Sorghum Sudan.

Even with all these challenges, much of the time we still have positive results with teff. For those people who have grown teff successfully in the past, they continue to grow teff. We will continue to carry teff because we believe it fits a very important niche. However, we will all have to work harder to ensure that teff gets placed in fields and under management conditions where it has the best chance for success. Those initial years of perfect weather and perfect circumstances showed us what is possible with teff and we think it is worth pursuing.