

Too Late To Plant Alfalfa This Season Says Agronomy Specialist

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

It is too late to try and establish alfalfa this fall according to Jay Chism, agronomy specialist with University of Missouri Extension in Barton County.

"If planting season was missed this fall, make plans to plant next spring. Mid-March to mid-April is also a good time to establish alfalfa," said Chism.

According to Tim Schnakenberg, an agronomy specialist with MU Extension in Stone County, spring seeding alfalfa may help avoid a disease called sclerotinia crown and stem rot.

"Sclerotinia tends to kill out young overwintering alfalfa seedlings," said Schnakenberg. "Weed control may be an issue in the spring. That makes it important to have a herbicide program in mind prior to planting."

Unless controlled, weeds can drastically reduce alfalfa stands. Alfalfa is especially suscep-

tible during its establishment. Fortunately, there are several pre and post applied herbicides that are available to help with weed control.

Traditionally, a companion planting of oats is used to reduce the impact of weeds.

"Oats in the early rapid growth stage will keep weeds from establishing," said Chism. "A companion crop also prevents water and wind erosion in alfalfa fields when the slope is conducive to soil loss."

Alfalfa plants really don't know the difference between a companion crop and a weed. Both can compete for light, moisture and nutrients.

Chism says both can also sometimes cause a problem as far as stand establishment.

"Successful alfalfa production requires attention to details," said Chism. "The most important weed control factor is a dense, vigorous stand of alfalfa that will crowd out weeds." Δ