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Interseeding alfalfa for more profitable corn silage

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Interseeded corn and alfalfa grow side by side in Wisconsin. Photo by Will Osterholz.

Researchers have found that including alfalfa in crop rotations for dairy farms provides important environmental and animal production benefits, but low yield of alfalfa during its establishment limits forage production and farm profitability. Interseeding alfalfa into corn silage is an establishment method that increases forage production, but it also incurs additional costs of production. Therefore, the overall net economic benefit is uncertain.

An article recently published in *Agronomy Journal* compared the crop production costs and forage value of conventional corn silage–alfalfa crop rotations to those of rotations using the interseeding approach.

The research team found that the interseeded rotations increased annualized net returns by 7 to 33% ($19 to $89 ha^{-1}) relative to similar conventional rotations. Additionally, the results showed that enhanced profitability occurred if the yield of corn interseeded with alfalfa reached at least 80% of that of corn in conventional rotations and if alfalfa establishment by interseeding was successful in at least 49% of attempts.

Interseeding holds the potential to enhance profitability of corn silage–alfalfa rotations and thus encourage greater utilization of alfalfa on dairy farms while providing additional benefits for soil and water conservation.

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Osterholz, W.R., Renz, M.J., & Grabber, J.H. (2020). Alfalfa establishment by interseeding with silage corn projected to increase profitability of corn silage–alfalfa rotations. *Agronomy Journal, 112*.

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