



# FORAGE SORGHUM AFTER WILDFIRES

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR NEBRASKA PRODUCERS

We know the recent wildfires have created real challenges for producers across our region. We hear you. Recovery can feel uncertain, and we don't have all the answers for what comes next. Whether you've grown sorghum before or are considering it for the first time, we've gathered a few resources and ideas that may help as you move forward.

“Sorghum has been a vital part of our rotation and an effective way to quickly restore cover on burned acres.”  
- Jan tenBensel, Cambridge, NE



Scan for the Western Forage Production Guide

Scan to watch: Livestock Feeding & Sorghum Use — 2026 Nebraska Sorghum Symposium



Scan for info on avoiding prussic acid and nitrate poisoning.

### OVERVIEW:

- Sorghum can be used as a cover crop, for grazing, haying, or for silage
- Can be planted from late spring to early August, depending on the usage
- Performs on a range of soils with moderate fertility
- Works well for:
  - Emergency cover and forage after wildfires
  - Replacing lost pasture or hay acres

### USAGE:

- Forage Sorghum
  - Primarily used as a silage or a one-time hay cutting
- Sorghum/sudangrass and sudangrass
  - Best suited for grazing or hay production

### Questions?

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# MOST COMMON MANAGEMENT PRACTICES


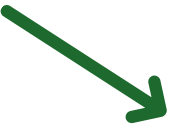
SORGHUM TYPE	PLANTING WINDOW	ROW SPACING	SEEDING RATE*	START GRAZING	HARVEST TIMING	BEST USE
<b>FORAGE SORGHUM</b>	> 60°F SOIL TEMP	15-30 INCHES	3-6 LBS/AC	NOT TYPICALLY GRAZED EARLY	SOFT DOUGH STAGE (SILAGE) OR BOOT STAGE	SILAGE OR 1 TIME BALEAGE
<b>SORGHUM SUDANGRASS</b>	LATE MAY-JULY	DRILLED TO 30 INCHES	6-18 LBS/AC	20-24 INCHES TALL	FIRST CUT: 40 DAYS OR 40 INCHES TALL, THEN EVERY 30 DAYS	GRAZING, 1 TIME OR MULTIPLE CUT HAY
<b>SUDANGRASS</b>	LATE MAY-JULY	DRILLED	12-20LBS/AC	ABOUT 18 INCHES TALL	FIRST CUT: 40 DAYS OR 40 INCHES TALL, THEN EVERY 30 DAYS	MULTIPLE CUT HAY OR GRAZING

\* Seeding rate should be adjusted based on yield potential  
Consider adjusting this table based on expected precipitation and overall crop rotation.

## ROTATION FIT:

- Fits well in any rotation
- Can boost the following crop yields
- Helps break pest & disease cycles

## SEEDING RATE:

Irrigated acres  higher seeding rates  
Dryland acres  lower seeding rates

## ROW SPACING:

- Typically 15–30 inches
- Narrow rows = quicker canopy, better weed suppression
- Wider rows may help conserve moisture in dryland systems

## WEED CONTROL:

- Critical early, sorghum is slow to canopy
- Use pre-emerge or early post herbicides
- Seed safeners allow the use of Group 15 products
  - Dual, Warrant, etc.
- Once established, sorghum competes well
- New hybrids may offer additional herbicide tolerance
- Always check labels - not all products are approved for forage sorghum

## FERTILITY:

- Requires less nitrogen than corn
- Typical guide is 25 lb/ac of N for every dry ton of forage produced. In a hay or grazing system, 50 to 100 pounds of N is sufficient.

## NITRATE TOXICITY:

- Risk increases under poor growing conditions
- Higher risk with drought/fire stress, cloudy weather, or high soil nitrogen
  - Important facts:
    - Nitrates concentrate in the lower stem
    - Hay does not reduce nitrates; silage can reduce levels 40–60%
  - Management tips:
    - Test forage before feeding
    - Raise cutting height (6–12 inches) & avoid grazing lower stalks
    - Introduce cattle gradually

## PRUSSIC ACID:

- Highest risk occurs in new growth
- Do not graze until plants reach at least 18–24 inches
- Risk increases after drought or plant stress
- Frost can trigger dangerous levels
  - wait 5–7 days before grazing or haying
- Consider removing cattle ahead of a frost event