

BATTLE RIVER AGRONOMY UPDATE

The snow is finally disappearing (and quickly) throughout the BRI trade area. People are getting equipment ready to go and with the early access to fields, there will be a temptation to start seeding early as well this year. If this is your intention there are a few things you should keep in mind to help get your crop off to a good start.

- 1) **Know your soil temperature.** Most of our crops will get their best emergence when they are seeded into soils that average 10 C. While it is not practical to wait for all the soil to hit 10 C, it is also not much use to plant anything prior to 4 C, as most of the crops we grow will not germinate until that temperature.
- 2) **Know the forecast.** It's one thing to go and seed 500 acres of wheat into cold ground, when the long term forecast is for a warming trend. It's another thing altogether to seed those 500 acres knowing the forecast is for snow.
- 3) **Know your soils.** Lighter, sandier soils are more prone to large temperature swings than are heavier soils. A heavier soil that has warmed to 5 C is better able to protect a germinating crop during an overnight dip below freezing temperatures without injuring the germinating crop.
- 4) **Know your field conditions.** A field that has the trash well managed and evenly spread will warm up more uniformly than a field where straw management is a problem. The more uniform conditions will help the crop emerge more evenly and reduce the stress.
- 5) **Know your seeding depth and rate.** Always seed as shallow as practical in cold soils so the seedbed can warm up as quickly as possible. When seeding shallow with a small seeded crop such as canola, it is important to keep your speed slow to minimize "seed bounce" that leaves expensive treated seed on the surface rather than in the seedbed. Also consider varying your seedling rate. The seedling survival rate is much lower for canola seeded into 5 C soils than for 10 C soils. If you are covering a lot of

acres, you can start the year at a higher seeding rate that you can then reduce as conditions become less stressful.

Hopefully the points above will give you some ideas about some of the ways to minimize the increased risks associated with early spring seeding. I would urge you to check out the Alberta Ag site for tips and specific information on both minimum and optimum soil temperatures for most of the crops we grow. Good luck to everybody in the upcoming busy season and remember to take the time to operate safely. Shortcuts and cutting corners sometimes lead to the emergency room rather than an earlier finish.

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