Broadcast Seeding

BMPs for CRP and Food Plots

WHAT AND WHY

Broadcast seeding may be simply scattering seed on the soil, but it's not as simple as throwing out seed and hoping something will grow. As always, site prep is critical as is the even distribution of the seed on the soil and incorporating the seed into the soil.

Broadcast seeding provides a couple advantages over drilling or planting seed. Foremost it allows seeding to be done in the dormant season (November – March) when the ground is frozen allowing natural stratification of seeds. This mimics the natural process with seeds dropping to the ground at the end of the growing season. It also reduces the chance seed will be planted too deeply in the soil (most CRP type projects use seed that does best when planted in the top 1/4" of soil). A final reason is that it is often easier for individual cooperators to secure broadcast equipment than native no-till drills.

HOW-TO OVERVIEW

To reiterate, broadcast seeding is not JUST throwing seed on the ground and hoping for it to grow. To have a successful project you must have 1) proper site prep, 2) seed must be properly mixed, 3) equipment must be calibrated and 4) seed must be incorporated into the soil.

SITE PREP

Site prep is perhaps the most important step (but not the topic of this article). Ideally you are striving for a weed (green and growing) and litter (dead vegetation on the ground) free, firm (boot print less than 1/2" deep) seed bed that resembles a harvested no-till bean field.

SEED PREP - MIXING

Different sized seeds found in CRP type mixes and food plot blends (ie Rooster Booster) require some additional steps to ensure seed is distributed evenly across the project.

1) Examine your seed. Often when seed is differently sized (in CRP projects), seed will be bagged separately with large fluffy seed in one bag and small seed in another. For large projects you can mix them together for broadcasting, but for smaller projects we recommend leaving them separated and applying in separate passes. Even distribution of similarly sized seed is easier than seed of different sizes.
2) **Partition your seed** – divide your project and seed into at least quarters. Do this based on bulk pounds. If you have 12# of seed and a 2-acre project, diving in quarters would give you a 3#s for every 1/2 acre.
3) **Consider a Carrier** - Carriers are especially important when seeding native grass mixes. Seed isn't heavy enough to flow through the spreader and seed of differing sizes settles at different rates. Carriers basically work to add bulk weight to the grass seed and help ensure the seed stays mixed across the field. A number of carriers can be used including: rice hulls, cracked corn, cocoa hulls, kitty litter, vermiculite, saw dust and oats. Generally use at least a 1:1 ratio of filler to seed, but some prefer higher ratios of up to 4:1. Some equipment may not require the use of a carrier (see calibrating equipment).
4) Mix your carrier separately with your seed partitions (you should at least have 4 different mixes).

CALIBRATING EQUIPMENT

1) Read the manual for your broadcast equipment. Failure to properly calibrate your equipment could have you put all of your seed on a small portion of your project. Ask yourself if you have the right equipment for your project?
2) If you are seeding native grass (fluffy seed), make sure your equipment has a working agitator (stirring devise) to prevent seed from binding up.
3) Calibrate your equipment. Follow equipment instructions for calibration. Generally, you will need to:
    a. Partition the mix (seed and carrier) for a very small area (200 ft2). This can be done in a similar way to #2 in the seed mixing section. 1 acre = 43,560 sq ft.
    b. Put the mix in the seeder.
    c. This can be done on a concrete driveway and mix swept up after calibration.
    d. Mark a starting point and move the spreader several feet to determine the width of the spread. Note that typically seed doesn't fly as far as the carrier so when determining the width, use only the area where the seed was spread. Remember this as the distance between passes when seeding. If seed was spread 10 feet in width, mark off 20 feet (10 x 20 = 200).
    e. If all the mix was used before you reached your full area, you will need to reduce the broadcaster rate. If you have mix remaining, increase the rate.
    f. Repeat until you have properly calibrated the equipment. Its better to error on a little seed left over.

SEEDING

With a good seed bed, prepared seed mix and calibrated equipment, its time to seed your project.

1) Timing – if possible, seed your project just ahead of a good rain (spring seeded), just after a light snow (dormant seeded) or just before some freeze thaw action (frost seeded).
2) Load your first mix partition into your seeder and spread across the first partition of your project. Be sure to pay attention to the seed levels so you don't run out too early. If the seed was evenly distributed on your first partition, repeat for the remaining partitions. If not, make the appropriate adjustments prior to seeding the next partition. Repeat until completed.
3) If you had differently sized seed, repeat the process for the other sized seed.

If you have seed left over, just go over the project area until all the seed is gone. You might want to go around the perimeter or along the side with a curious neighbor so they get the best view of the project.

INCORPORATION – PACK / HARROW / DRAG

With the seed evenly distributed across the top of the soil, it is time to ensure good seed to soil contact. For dormant and frost seedings, mother nature will take care of this with freeze-thaw cycles working the seed into the soil. For spring projects, you can use a cultipacker, light harrow or drag to achieve soil contact.

QUESTIONS??? SPEAK WITH A WILDLIFE EXPERT at:
877-914-7373

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