

FORAGE SORGHUM

COVER CROP FACT SHEET FOR IOWA

Forage Sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor* (L.) Moench) is a quick growing summer annual grass that is an excellent cover crop for scavenging excess nitrogen, suppressing weeds, and fighting soil compaction.



Identifying Features

- » Similar characteristics as corn
- » First leaf is pointed
- » Leaves elongate out of a whorl
- » Toothed leaf margins

Cultural Traits

- » Summer annual grass
- » Minimum germination soil temperature: 65° F
- » Cold temperature tolerance: 32° F
- » Seeding date: Early May to Early August*

Planting Information*

- » **Drill** at ¾ - 1½-inch (15 lbs./acre PLS**)
- » **Broadcast** (17 lbs./acre PLS)
- » **Aerial** (Not recommended)

*Planting information from Midwest Cover Crop Council (midwestcovercrops.org). Refer to local NRCS office recommendations (Iowa Field Office Technical Guide, Section 4, 340 Cover Crop) for seeding dates and rates pertinent to location specific financial assistance program requirements.

**Pure Live Seed

Additional planting information:

- » ~17,000 seeds/lb.
- » Increase seeding rate if using for forage/grazing.
- » Planting in a mixture can enhance performance as a cover crop.
- » If planting for forage use, increase the seeding rate.



Forage Sorghum Seeds



Forage sorghum sprouting



Forage sorghum early growth



Forage sorghum field sustains wind damage.

C:N (Carbon:Nitrogen) Ratio

- » Forage Sorghum 50:1

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Maturing forage sorghum leaves.



Forage sorghum field from above view.

Performance

Dry matter = 500 - 6,000 lbs./acre per year
(Biomass quantity is dependent on planting and termination dates and precipitation.)

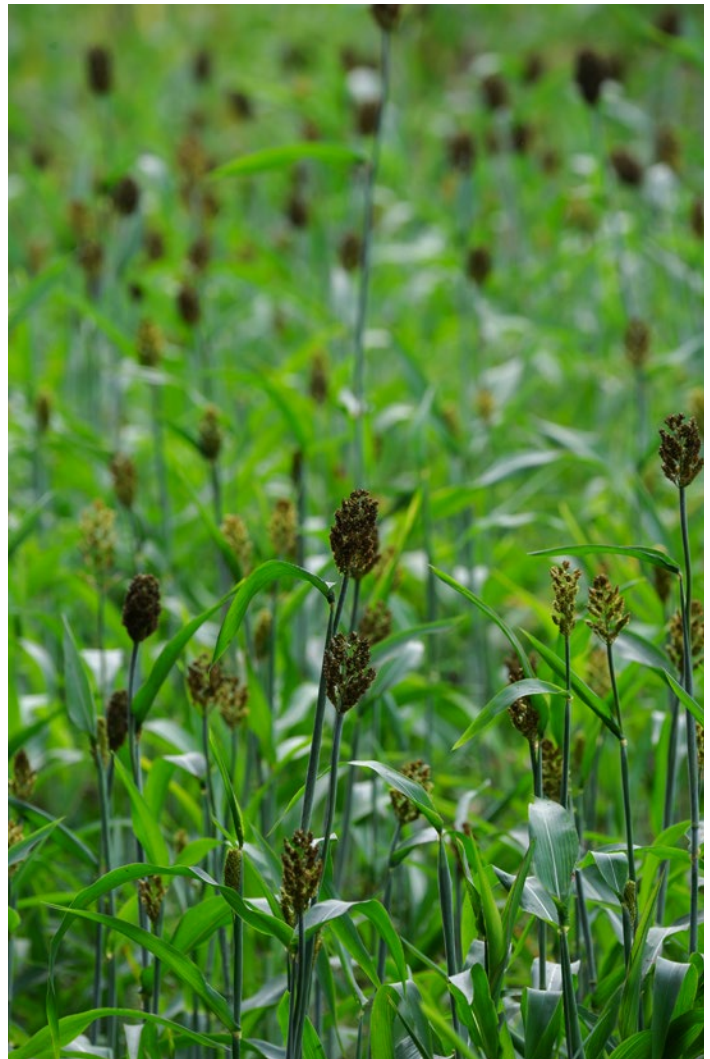
Performance Ratings

» Cash crop interseed (<i>early vegetative</i>)	Poor
» Cash crop overseed (<i>late seed fill</i>)	Poor
» Grazing quality	Good
» Mechanical forage harvest	Excellent
» Nitrogen fixer	N/A
» Nitrogen scavenger	Excellent
» Weed suppression	Excellent
» Compaction fighter	Excellent
» Erosion control	Very good
» Lasting residue	Excellent
» Quick grower	Excellent
» Drought tolerance	Very good
» Low fertility tolerance	Good
» Shade tolerance	Poor

Additional Considerations

- » Does not tolerate shade, flooding, or ponding.
- » Well-suited for grazing and wildlife.
- » Forage Sorghum will winterkill easily.
- » Sorghum can cause prussic acid poisoning in livestock. Do not graze until at least 18-24 inches.
- » Mowing to a height of less than 2 inches after 2 feet or more of growth may terminate.

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This fact sheet is a collaborative effort of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to provide cover crop options and information for Iowa landowners.