



November 20, 2025

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

CONTACT: Stan Wise, Communications Coordinator

PHONE: 605-368-4091

EMAIL: [stan.soilhealth@sdconservation.net](mailto:stan.soilhealth@sdconservation.net)

## **Dormant seeding makes room for wheat in crop rotations**

*By Stan Wise*

*South Dakota Soil Health Coalition*

PIERRE, SD – It's the age-old struggle – farmers scramble to get their work done within the timeframe that Mother Nature affords them. Depending on the local weather patterns, it can be a challenge, and farmers who follow regenerative agriculture practices can face a few additional hurdles in their race against the weather and poor field conditions. Thankfully, farmers and researchers have learned a few tricks to make it work.

One important principle of regenerative land management is to increase the biodiversity on the land. For farmers, this means a diversified crop rotation. A common first step can be to add a small grain like wheat to a corn/soybean rotation.

“Winter wheat outyields spring wheat because it escapes the hot weather. Wheat and warm weather are just not friends,” said Dwyane Beck, South Dakota State University professor emeritus of agronomy and longtime manager of the Dakota Lakes Research Farm near Pierre, SD.

The problem with winter wheat is that it's hard to plant after soybean harvest. “Winter wheat behind soybeans just doesn't look all that good,” Beck said.

So, the next best option is spring wheat. “Your best spring wheat is seeded early in most years because it escapes the hot weather,” Beck said. The problem is that some areas of South Dakota, like the James River Valley, are wetter in the spring, making it difficult for farmers to get in the field early enough to plant spring wheat. In those cases, the spring wheat often goes unplanted, and the crop rotation has less biodiversity.

However, since 1983 Beck has been using a method to get the spring wheat planted early.

Really early. Think November.

The practice is called dormant seeding. The spring wheat is planted in the winter, and the seeds go dormant until the spring thaw when they get a jump start on growth since they are already in the soil.

“Most instances where we’ve done comparisons – and I think we’ve had one exception – dormant seeded spring wheat yielded the same or better than spring seeded spring wheat,” Beck said.

If a farmer has a very diverse rotation, dormant seeding can really help to manage the workflow. “The other reason we do it is you take the workload off if you're growing things like canola and peas and lentils and flax and whatever. It takes the pressure off getting that done,” Beck said.

The best time to dormant seed spring wheat is before the weather turns bad in late November or early December. “We always joked that the ideal day to do that is Friday after Thanksgiving, Black Friday, because you don't have to go shopping with your wife,” Beck said.

Beck has even dormant seeded spring wheat into frozen ground. “We've done it after snow. If the ground is dry and frozen, it's not hard, believe it or not. But if it's moist when it freezes, you can't get it done,” he said. “Our goal is to do it prior to freezing.”

There are a few considerations that producers should be aware of, Beck said. “You got to be low disturbance. I'd like to see pretty good residues. So, a history of having done no-till for a while or left some residue on there. Then you got to have a good seeder,” he said. “We think you need to put the fertilizer down with it. We've got some trials of that where that was an advantage with the phosphorus-, potassium-type starter fertilizers, not the nitrogen. Do things like you normally would and plant at the same depth.”

“The biggest hang up is you've put the seeders away, and they're all cleaned up and they're away. Then you drag them back out again, and then the days are incredibly short,” Beck said. “If you're going to run all daylight stuff, your run time is way shorter than other times of year. And if you're going to run longer into the night, the nights are just cold, dark, and you got to have somebody out there to fill your seeder up and help you do that.”

Despite these constraints, dormant seeding can help producers get their spring wheat in the ground early and free up time in the spring. “The biggest thing is it gets it done,” Beck said. “Guys are just so busy in the spring.”

To learn more about regenerative land management practices and the work South Dakota Soil Health Coalition completes with its partners like the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and many others, visit [www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org](http://www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org) or contact the Coalition at 605-280-4190 or [sdsoilhealth@gmail.com](mailto:sdsoilhealth@gmail.com).



*Courtesy photo*

Dormant seeded spring wheat, on the left, compared with spring seeded spring wheat, on the right, at Dakota Lakes Research Farm near Pierre, SD.

To download a high-resolution version of this image, visit: <https://bit.ly/3ZaGfKV>



*Courtesy photo*

Dwyane Beck, South Dakota State University professor emeritus of agronomy and longtime manager of the Dakota Lakes Research Farm, and his dog Beau, highlight the difference between dormant seeded spring wheat, left, and spring seeded spring wheat, right.

To download a high-resolution version of this image, visit: <https://bit.ly/4fBsvP7>