

Early-Season Stands Set the Tone

Planting is nearing the finish line across much of the Upper Midwest, let's look into stand evaluation. In both corn and soybeans, this is the point where visual impressions need to give way to counts, uniformity notes, and realistic replant economics. This issue focuses on three practical questions: how far scouting counts should run by row width, what stand is actually there, and when is a thin or uneven stand still worth keeping.

Stand count chart: Use the 1/1000-acre method for fast, repeatable stand counts. Measure the row length below, count only viable plants, and multiply the count by 1,000 to estimate plants per acre.

Stand count scouting technique

- Do counts from four to six representative spots in a field, plus separate notes from obvious problem areas.
- Count only live plants with a realistic chance to continue developing; dead or clearly noncompetitive plants should not be included.
- Record skips, doubles, delayed plants, crusting, ponding, or sidewall issues while counting, because stand quality matters along with final population.
- Average the counts from representative areas and multiply by 1,000 to estimate the final stand per acre.

Row width	Distance to count
15-inch	34 ft 10 in
20-inch	26 ft 2 in
22-inch	23 ft 9 in
30-inch	17 ft 5 in

Example calculation: In a 30-inch row, a scout counts 29 live corn plants in 17 feet 5 inches. That equals about 29,000 plants per acre. Four counts of 28, 30, 31, and 29 plants would average 29.5, or about 29,500 plants per acre.

Corn, the goal is simple: get every plant out of the ground at the same time and keep early stress from turning into uneven development. Uniform emergence matters because later plants act more like weeds than full contributors, and research summaries show meaningful yield loss when a portion of the stand lags by one to two leaf stages.

Corn is less forgiving than soybeans when emergence is uneven, so both stand and plant-to-plant uniformity should drive the decision. Replant tables are built around the trade-off between reduced current stand and delayed replant yield potential.

Final stand	Before May 10	May 10-20	After May 20
24,000+	Keep	Keep	Keep
20,000-23,999	Keep if uniform	Consider economics	Usually keep
16,000-19,999	Compare yield vs. delay	Borderline	Often keep
Below 16,000	Strong replant case	Case-by-case	Late replant risk

The matrix is built on a target planting rate of 32,500 so if you have lower planting targets, this matrix would need to be lower based on your planting rate.

Corn scouting reminders

- Uneven emergence can cost yield even when total population looks acceptable.
- Dig plants in uneven areas to check for sidewall compaction, crusting, seed furrow issues, or early root restriction.
- Replant decisions should be based on surviving stand, uniformity, and realistic replant date, not appearance from the road.

Soybean stand review should be top of mind this week because many early-planted fields are now emerging unevenly after cool conditions, surface crusting, and scattered ponding events. The first question is not whether the stand is perfect, but whether it is uniform, healthy, and above the practical threshold where replanting usually fails to return enough yield to pay for itself. Use stand counts from several representative areas and only count live plants that are likely to continue developing. The same 1/1000-acre method works for soybeans in the chart from the earlier section, but acceptable final stands are often lower because soybeans compensate through branching.

Soybean replant decisions should center on live stand, spacing, and date rather than chasing a perfect-looking field. Early-planted soybean stands can often be left at lower populations than most growers expect, particularly when plants are healthy and gaps are limited.

Final stand	Before May 15	May 15–31	June
100,000+	Keep	Keep	Keep
75,000–99,999	Keep if uniform	Keep	Keep
50,000–74,999	Consider gaps and vigor	Usually keep	Keep
Below 50,000	Replant or fill-in case	Borderline economics	Late replant often loses

Soybean scouting reminders

- Desired stands may be near 100,000 plants per acre, but uniform stands near 70,000 to 75,000 can still retain most yield potential.
- Early-planted fields below 75,000 plants per acre deserve closer review, while late-May and June fields often have lower replant thresholds around 50,000 to 60,000 plants per acre.
- Large dead gaps, seedling disease, ponding, and uneven emergence matter more than cosmetic thinness alone.

References

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