

## BE READY FOR FIRST CUTTING

You've been busy planting crops and getting work done with the late start this spring. But don't relax just yet because your alfalfa soon may be ready to cut.

Looking at alfalfa in Nebraska this past week, I saw fields nearly ready to cut and others just recovering from the freeze a couple weeks ago. Some folks that need high quality for their dairy cows or for a cash crop may already have started cutting, and others should be looking for the next available good weather period.

Being aggressive on the first cutting is critical if high forage quality is needed. Alfalfa's forage quality changes faster during the first spring growth than at any other time of the year. Plants are maturing and temperatures are increasing; both cause quality to decline. So don't delay if quality is needed.

But what about alfalfa for beef cows? Now that might be a little different story, especially if you are trying to build hay reserves. Normally we get our highest total yield by waiting until alfalfa is near full bloom. Not only is yield highest, this also uses what soil moisture is available for most efficient alfalfa growth. In dryland fields in some areas you may need quite a bit more rain for good summer and fall harvests if deep subsoils remain dry. But with a good first cut you at least will have some hay of good enough quality to feed your beef cows next winter.

Timing of hay harvest is important whether your needs are for high quality or for high yield. With alfalfa becoming ready to cut soon this spring, don't miss your best time.

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