

## GRASS-ALFALFA MIXTURES INSTEAD OF PURE ALFALFA

Hay growers in our area often plant new fields to alfalfa without even thinking about other alternatives. For lots of folks, pure alfalfa is the best choice, but for many of you, mixing in some grass, like orchardgrass or festulolium, with your alfalfa might be better.

Let's look at some advantages of a grass-alfalfa mixture. If you regularly feed more than five or six pounds of alfalfa per day to stock cows during winter, they probably are getting too much protein but maybe not enough TDN. Mixing grass with alfalfa usually lowers the protein but increases slightly the TDN content of hay. So your cows actually could receive a more balanced diet. Also, if you sometimes graze your hay fields, grass will reduce the risk of bloat.

In the field, grass can grow in areas where alfalfa is not well-adapted or fill in spots as alfalfa dies out. This is better than having weeds invade bare areas. Grass-alfalfa mixtures dry out more rapidly after cutting than pure alfalfa so you might get more hay made without rain damage. And if it does rain, the mixture usually suffers less damage, both in the windrow and in the bale.

Yield-wise, protein yield per acre will be less with the mix, but total tonnage will be about the same or slightly higher. Most of the grass yield will come at first cut, so regrowth will be mostly alfalfa. Selling a mixture can be more difficult because dairies prefer pure alfalfa and grass is more difficult to grind.

You know alfalfa is good, but maybe for you, mixing it with grass is better.

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