

## OCTOBER ALFALFA HARVESTS

A few weeks ago, I discouraged cutting alfalfa while it was winterizing because of potential winter injury. Things have changed since then.

By mid-October the growing season is pretty much complete. Many folks received some late season rain and some areas have had light frosts that left alfalfa plants pretty much unaffected. So, you might have a substantial, high quality alfalfa crop remaining in your field.

Alfalfa that has had at least six weeks of regrowth in mid-October since the previous cutting will have developed adequate winterhardiness for all but the most severe winters. It also has begun to go dormant naturally because of shorter days and cooler temperatures so harvest is not likely to jeopardize stand persistence. Not only that, October hay often has exceptionally high quality. With high prices paid for dairy hay, another cutting is very tempting.

Hay harvest can be difficult, though, because alfalfa dries and cures very slowly in October. If you do cut hay, be extra alert to weather reports, use a conditioner to speed dry-down, spread windrows wide for extra exposure to sunlight, and consider using a preservative to protect hay that's baled at higher than normal moisture levels.

When possible, it's better to harvest alfalfa as haylage in October. Less drying is needed, and since drying is slower, haylage can be made at a more uniform moisture content than in summer. October alfalfa also tends to preserve well as haylage.

Grazing is another option now, but continue to be cautious about bloat. Also avoid grazing on wet soils, or stand damage could occur.

Good alfalfa in mid-October doesn't have to be sacrificed to maintain winter-hardiness. Just be sure you had adequate time to develop winter-hardiness, and then select a good harvest method.

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