



April 16, 2004

CHECK ALFALFA FIELDS NOW

Since spring seems to be early this year, alfalfa weevil damage could cause earlier and greater damage to your alfalfa than in recent years. Based on growing degrees days that have occurred thus far, alfalfa weevils have started to hatch out on our 2004 alfalfa crop. That means it is time to scout alfalfa right when we are busy with other things. They have been found to be very active already in some Central Kansas fields and alfalfa weevils can seriously damage alfalfa. The larvae are pale yellowish green with black heads and a white stripe down their back.

Damage first appears as small holes eaten on new leaves near the growing tips. As feeding increases, the field begins to take on a grayish tint. Begin monitoring fields as soon as alfalfa is 4 to 6 inches tall. If you see damage, carefully cut 30 to 50 stems per field to ground level and shake the stems against the inside of a bucket. Count the number of weevil larvae in the bucket and determine the average number per stem. Then, use charts available at local extension offices to aid you in making a decision on whether to control the weevils. Go to www.saline.unl.edu for more information.

If control is recommended, either harvest alfalfa early or use insecticides. I like early harvest if within ten days of normal harvest because you save on insecticide cost and get higher quality alfalfa. Monitor your alfalfa fields regularly this spring for alfalfa weevils. It could save you a lot of feed.

NET WRAP VS TWINE

Some farmers are now wrapping bales instead of using twine. Net wrapping bales is not cheap. Equipment costs three to four thousand dollars and plastic net is seventy-five cents to a dollar more per bale than twine. So the question becomes is wrapping bales worth the expense?

Net wrap can be better three ways. Research from Wisconsin has shown that net wrap reduces harvest losses about one percent. That is how much you lose while bales are spinning many times when wrapping with twine.

Storage losses are quite a bit less with net wrap because net wrapped bales shed water better. Under the Wisconsin conditions, twine wrapped bales lost eleven percent of their weight but net wrapped bales only lost seven percent during five to twelve months of outdoor storage. A producer can expect an extra four percent feed from net wrapping and that is not even counting the better forage quality found in net wrapped bales.

A couple percent here and there may not sound like much, but if you add the harvest and storage losses together to save five percent of your hay and it costs a dollar to wrap each bale, hay only needs to be worth about thirty-five dollars per ton to pay for the net wrapping material.

By far the biggest savings, though, may be time. Net wrapping only takes a couple turns of the bale compared to fifteen, twenty, even thirty turns for twine. Waiting to finish twine wrapping



wastes time, burns fuel, and adds to tractor wear and tear. As a result, you can make thirty percent more bales per hour using net wrap.

According to UNL forage specialist Bruce Anderson, little things can make big differences. How you wrap your bales is one of those things.

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