

WEB CONTENT DISPLAY
July 2, 2010

REMOVE BALES SOON AFTER HARVEST

Last week gave area producers the first good stretch of hay making weather all year. Who would have thought a couple of months ago that our first good stretch of haying weather would come during the last week of June. As I drove to the Nemaha and Shubert area last week in Southeast Nebraska, beside the flooded fields east of Auburn, I noticed a lot of straw was being put up from newly cut wheat fields and a large number of bales had been made on alfalfa fields and waterways.

Bales and stacks of hay left in the middle of grass and alfalfa fields have to be removed some time. After the final cutting for the year, it may not matter too much if they sit there for a while. But when more harvests are expected off that field, delaying removal can be harmful. One problem is directly under the bale or stack. Plants underneath often are killed if covered for more than a week or two. This may not hurt yield too much, but makes for a great place for weeds to get started and we all know how they can spread.

Most of the damage, though, is due to wheel traffic on the regrowth. Research has shown that when fields are dry, plants driven on before regrowth occur yields about 5 to 7 percent less at next cutting. It gets much worse if you wait to remove bales. Just seven days after cutting, when regrowth shoots had started to grow, yield was reduced over 25 percent and fewer of these plants survived.

Worse yet is removing bales when fields are wet. Then wheel traffic causes much more compaction. When this happens, yield loss typically exceeds 30 percent.

These studies emphasize the benefits of baling and removing bales from hay fields as quickly as possible after cutting as well as minimizing driving on wet soils. They also suggest that following the same trail when removing bales or stacks from fields can reduce losses from wheel tracks by limiting the total area damaged.

Hay fields must be driven on, of course, to remove bales after harvest. But remember, you can lessen damage by controlling where, when, and how often you drive.

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