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Have You Heard?

By Randy Pryor, Extension Educator Saline County

WEATHER AFFECTING HAY PRICES

Farming is a risky business and most farmers would say that is a gross understatement. The weather risk this year has heightened concerns with the lack of a full profile of soil moisture like what we are used to experiencing and the lack of normal rainfall this spring. The temperatures in the 80's last week caused alfalfa and wheat to turn off color in the tougher areas of fields already and that's not a good sign.

April precipitation was well below normal in Saline County. April showers, on average, usually bring us 2.5 inches of moisture or more. Western reported .55, Crete .89 and Friend wins the dry contest reporting .24 of precipitation in April. We had temperatures in the 80's nine of the first 11 days in May and the dry pattern continued in Saline County. We normally would expect 4.5 inches of rain in May, on average, our highest precipitation month. In May, thus far, Western reported .93, Crete .41 and Friend wins the dry contest again with .17 being reported. However, planting conditions this spring were near perfect once we warmed up.

Hay prices have escalated considerably. A local producer reported selling third cutting alfalfa for \$150 per bale. The USDA hay report for our area was lacking information this week but in North central and Northeast Kansas, grinding quality alfalfa was going for \$110 to \$120 per ton with an instance up to \$150. Large round grass hay was in the \$90 to \$100 per ton figures.

Alfalfa growth was held back because of the cold weather in April. But now in May, being aggressive on the first cutting is critical if high forage quality is needed for dairy quality alfalfa. Alfalfa's forage quality changes faster during the first spring growth than at any other time of the year. Bruce Anderson, UNL Extension Forage Specialist, reminds us plants are maturing now and with increased temperatures: both cause quality to decline. So don't delay if high quality is needed for the dairy market.

But what about alfalfa for beef cows? That might be a little different story, especially if you need to rebuild hay supplies. Normally we get our highest total yield by waiting until alfalfa is near full bloom. Not only is yield highest, this also uses available soil moisture most efficiently for alfalfa growth.

Our dryland fields will need quite a bit more rain for good summer and fall harvests. But if we can squeeze out a good first cutting you at least will have some hay of good enough quality to feed beef cows this winter. Timing of hay harvest is important whether your needs are for high quality or for high yield. Timing is everything but goals can be different with alfalfa quality and yield. With alfalfa becoming ready to cut soon this spring, don't miss the best time for your farming operation.

WHEAT PLOT TOUR: Growers can learn about the latest wheat varieties and view many of them in the field on Wednesday, May 30, near Fairbury. We will begin at 6:30 p.m. in a wheat variety plot hosted by Mark Knobel and myself. Experts at the site will include UNL Wheat Breeder Stephen Baenziger; Paul Jasa, Nebraska Extension Engineer; and Stephen Wegulo, Nebraska Extension Plant Pathologist. You can rely on unbiased, research-based information from Nebraska Extension at field events such as the wheat variety plot tour. Many participants discover new knowledge and ideas and meet other farmers striving for high yielding wheat as part of a crop rotation scheme. Knobel Seeds and Nebraska Extension are hosting refreshments, including fresh made kolaches, at the field site. From Fairbury: Travel northeast on Highway 136 for 3 miles and turn north on 571 Avenue. Go north for 2.6 miles on 571 Avenue. Turn east on 716 Road for 0.2 mile. The wheat plot is on the south side of the road. GPS Coordinates 40.204547, -97.120798. For more information go to our website: saline.unl.edu

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