



June 22, 2018

MANAGING SEEDING YEAR ALFALFA

Despite the dry weather this spring and now with the good rain that we finally received, alfalfa seeded this spring is ready, or soon will be ready, to cut. Bruce Anderson, Extension forage specialist, says to use the following harvest guidelines to get the most from your first-year alfalfa.

Seeding year alfalfa is different from established stands. Stems are spindly, roots are small and shorter, and growth is a little slower. You can harvest seeding year alfalfa as early as 40 days after seedlings emerge. It is important to note that the guideline is 40 days after emergence rather than after planting. It takes plants about 40 days to develop their ability to regrow from the crown after cutting. If plants are cut before this development takes place, maybe to control weeds, at least one set of leaves must remain on the plant for it to regrow.

Although alfalfa seedlings can be harvested 40 days after emerging, Bruce says it's better to wait until around 60 days after emergence, at late bud to early bloom stage, before first cut. Yield will be a little higher and plants will withstand weather stress easier with a little extra growth. This extra time also allows roots to penetrate the soil more deeply, helping avoid problems from soil compaction or surface soil dryness.

These first harvest recommendations may be earlier than some folks like to cut. However, after this early cutting the regrowth of seedling alfalfa will become more similar to established alfalfa, giving you the opportunity for two or three cuts the first year. And, it helps control many weeds as well.

Another point of emphasis is never cut seeding year alfalfa during the four week period before a killing freeze. Winter injury can be severe due to reduced winterhardiness. So look ahead at the calendar to plan when future cuts might be taken to avoid cutting during this sensitive time.

First year alfalfa can be productive, if it is managed right.

Hay market: USDA at the Kearney, NE office publishes a weekly Nebraska hay price summary. One easy way to find it is on a google search type USDA Hay Report, Nebraska. The number one hit will be the report you need to see. For instance, this past week ending on June 22nd in Eastern Nebraska, Alfalfa: Premium, large square bales was \$180.00 per ton FOB. Grass Hay: New crop Premium, large square bales \$150.00. Old crop, Good, large round bales \$105.00. Premium, small square bales \$150.00. Dehy, Alfalfa pellets, 17 percent protein \$240.00 per ton. For additional information check with local feed yard pricing, local auctioneers and sale barns and also pull up the north central and northeast Kansas USDA Hay reports.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture has a hay and forage hotline that hay sellers can use free of charge. For further information go to:

<http://www.nda.nebraska.gov/promotion/hay/index.html> It had quite a few entries last year and so far just a couple new entries this year. The direct listing is at:

<http://www.nda.nebraska.gov/promotion/hay/sellers.pdf>



I have a newer hay probe at the Saline County Extension Office you can borrow if you are selling or buying hay and wish to check quality. For instance this spring a local grower tested his first cutting alfalfa that was baled at night to help retain quality. The relative feed value was 222 or over double the quality of average hay. The crude protein content was 23%. This alfalfa meets the premium, dairy quality hay standard when pricing the alfalfa hay.

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