

# Alfalfa management tips given

Alfalfa and alfalfa grass mixtures continue to be excellent hay and silage crops for Southeast Pennsylvania farmers, in spite of rising production costs and all the problems we've had with alfalfa this past growing season. However, alfalfa requires a lot of management, and in a year like this year - a lot of patience, too! Do not let the disappointments of this past year discourage you on alfalfa or on alfalfa grass mixtures. This was an exceptional year; you should be planning your farming operations around normal situations and normal years.

## A. To Increase Yields Next Spring -

1. Do not cut alfalfa between September 1 and

September 15 in S.E. Pennsylvania. During this critical period of time, alfalfa plants are forming new rhizomes just below ground level. These rhizomes produce next Spring's growth of alfalfa. Thus, harvesting alfalfa during the first 2 weeks of September can reduce the number of rhizomes formed - and next year's yield, too.

## B. To Increase The Life of Your Alfalfa Stand -

1. Be "easy" with your last cutting, especially if your first cutting was made at one-tenth bloom or earlier, or if your stand was severely stressed this summer by diseases, insects and wet conditions.

- Do not cut between September 1 and the first

killing frost. This gives the plant a month or more to build up the energy reserves in its root system to help carry it through the winter and to produce new growth next spring.

2. Top dress after last cutting; maintain high levels of potash. Do not topdress with manure; the nitrogen will only encourage weeds and grasses and it will shorten the life of the stand.

3. If any late cuttings are made after a killing frost, they should be made before October 15. Also leave about 4 inches of stubble to help protect the crown and to help catch snow for winter cover.

4. Spring and fall cutting schedules are closely related in terms of stand persistence. If first cutting was made at mid bloom or later, and if the stand was not severely stressed during the summer, last cutting can be made at any time before October 15.

## C. To Control All Those Yellow Weeds in Next Spring's Alfalfa -

Now is the time to control winter annual weeds in alfalfa. Some of these weeds include: 1. yellow rocket or winter cress (the yellow-flowered weed that most people mistake for wild mustard). 2. wild mustard

(it's also yellow-flowered, but it's bushier and comes later than yellow rocket), 3. shepherds purse and penny cress (both of these are white-flowered), and 4. chickweed (the low-growing, matted weed that chokes out alfalfa and interferes with cutting and drying operations).

All of these weeds are winter annuals that germinate in the fall (now). They can be controlled by spraying this fall. However, do not expect the same 100 percent control you may be used to seeing in your corn fields. Some of these weeds act as biennials; it takes them 2 years to reach

maturity and die a natural death. And, the sprays only work on the new seedlings that germinate this fall - not on those weeds already established from last year. Thus, if you did not spray last year and you had weedy fields this spring, it may take 2 years of spraying to get real good control.

Select one of the weed control programs listed below:

1. Apply 1-1½ lb. Princep 80W in 20-40 gal. of water per acre immediately after last cutting on alfalfa stands established before June 1, or on alfalfa orchard grass stands over 1 year old, to control all of the weeds mentioned above.

2. Apply 1½-2 lb. Karmex 80W in at least 20 gal. of water per acre to new or

established seedlings of legumes only, after the legume has reached dormancy, to control all of the weeds mentioned above. Do not use on sandy or shaly soils or where soil organic matter is less than 2 percent.

3. For control of quackgrass and chickweed in new or established seedlings of legumes only, apply 2-3 lbs. Kerb 50W in at least 20 gal. water per acre after soil temperatures drop to 50 degrees F. or lower and before the ground freezes up.

4. For control of chickweed and downy brome grass in new or established seedlings of legumes only, apply 1 qt. of Chloro IPC in at least 20 gal. of water per acre during November or December, or use 2 qt. of Chloro IPC in January.



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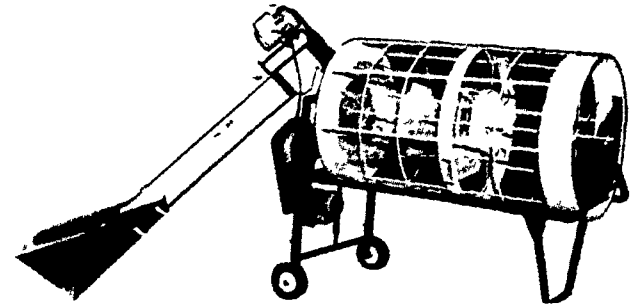
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