

# Champion alfalfa grower reveals his formula

PEN ARGYL — "I plow down alfalfa stands that many other growers would keep," admits Fred Achenbach who raises 175 acres of hay and 225 acres of corn for his 170 heifers near here in Northampton County.

"I may be fussy but I'm not wasteful," he explains. "I get home-grown nitrogen if I have to plow it under."

Achenbach says alfalfa is so easily influenced by the weather that it's the hardest crop to manage. Yet his silos usually bulge with yields of about six tons per acre on new hay, and eight tons on established hay. He clear seeds Saranac AR or Thor on 35 to 50 acres each year, in three-year rotations with corn on contoured strips. The Flemish hay varieties grow fast, although they lack hardiness, he says.

Achenbach's low pH soils are treated with lime containing either calcium or magnesium - depending on results of soil tests. He also plows down 500 pounds per acre of 0-100-100 fertilizer. Manure goes on in the Fall.

"At planting I apply 175 to 200 pounds per acre of my own blend of fertilizer, 11-36-20 and a little potash, banded in the drill," he says. "I seed directly above the closure of the fertilizer boot, at 17 to 18 pounds per acre, one-fourth inch deep. Then I follow with a colter packer. I pioneered this band method 30 years ago, and about half the growers around here plant this way now."

Winterkill usually doesn't



The Outstanding Farmer Award from the Pennsylvania Grassland Council was given Achenbach in 1974 for both hay and corn production. The Northumberland county farmer raises 175 acres of hay and 225 acres of corn for a herd of Holstein heifers.

both Achenbach. "Good fertility prevents thinning out. Some growers try to accomplish this by letting their hay grow after mid-September. I make a cutting and I still get enough growth to insulate roots, catch snow, and stop erosion." He often cuts new hay three times, and established hay four.

Raising soil pH also improves herbicide effectiveness, he says. Achenbach tries to keep weeds out of new plantings until the first cutting; the hay smothers most weeds from then on.

"I've found that both Eptam and a newer preplant incorporated (PPI) herbicide, Tolban, are good for control of my annual grasses and broadleaves," he says. "But a few years ago we had four tractors following the

spray boom because we had to get Eptam incorporated almost right away, as required. Tolban has a four-hour limit, so I've switched to it. After all, my only full-time helpers are my wife Rosa, son Henry, and grandson Wayne, 20."

Chickweed is not on those PPI-herbicide labels. So in the Fall if hay is dormant but there are days of at least 70

degrees F, he'll spray Chloro IPC. Otherwise he puts on Princep at that time.

At harvest, Achenbach aims for 23 per cent protein. His 20-year-old shed for drying hay on the wagon sits idle, due to rising fuel and labor costs. Instead he assures quality by spraying the alfalfa with Chem Store, a combination of propionic and acetic acids. He also bales at night.

"Rain, dew, wind and hot sun can prevent me from

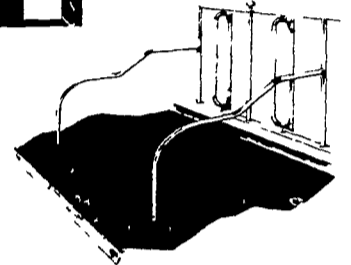
getting the right blend of dry stems and damp leaves that I want," he declares. "So I'll cut at any hour, day or night. Generally, I like to start baling a little before sunset, when stems are dry from midday heat and brittle leaves begin to soften in the dew."

For his innovations, Achenbach in 1974 earned an outstanding farmer award from the Pennsylvania Grassland Council, for both hay and corn production.

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