Dairy Pipeline

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reduces leaf loss and minimizes losses due to bleaching and leeching.

More leaves are preserved, too, if hay is handled as few times as possible and if not handled when dry. Here is where haybines are of benefit, they minimize the number of times hay is handled by performing the cutting, the crushing and the windrowing, all in one operation and while the hay crop has sufficient moisture. If raking or tedding is necessary, be sure the hay is moist enough to prevent leaf shattering. Let it finish drying in the windrow.

Ensiling is another way farmers can insure top quality in their hay and small grain crop forages. For top quality, ensiled forages should be wilted to about 50 to 65% moisture. Chop to a length of about ½ inch, blow it into a tight structure, fill rapidly, pack well, and then seal. Keep the knives sharp for a good, uniform cut. The length of cut can vary with moisture content; perhaps a 3/8 inch cut for dryer material and 5/8 inch for wetter material. The value of preservatives is generally greater at moisture levels above and below the desired range.

Because moisture testing is so essential for good management and efficient production, all dairymen who feed high moisture feeds should own a moisture tester and use it regularly during harvesting, and as the crop is being fed out. In the absence of a moisture tester, these guidelines may help give you a rough indication of the moisture content of your forages at time of harvest. Grab a handful of finely chopped forage and squeeze it tightly. If the ball holds its shape when you release your grip and your hand is moist, it's probably about 71 to 75% moist. If the ball expands slowly and your hand is not damp, the moisture level is probably about 61 to 70%. Below 60%, the ball usually springs apart when you open your hand.

Yield and Longevity

Also consider yield and longevity of the alfalfa stand. Early removal of the first cutting of alfalfa usually enables farmers to beat the alfalfa weevil and to get an extra cutting of hay for that growing season. It also permits the possibility of two cuttings to be harvested prior to the onset of summer droughts and potato leafhoppers. All of this adds up to improved quality, greater yields and more profits.

Remember, too, it is expensive to establish new stands of alfalfa. So, give some thought to the vigor and life of the stand. Aftermath cuttings can be harvested about 35 to 42 days after the previous cutting - when the basal buds start shooting new growth. However, at least one of the cuttings should be allowed to come into bloom. This gives the alfalfa plant an opportunity to replenish its root reserves, thus increasing its ability to overwinter. Similarly, the first cutting of a new seeding of alfalfa sould be harvested at about the 1/10 to mid-bloom stage of maturity. This gives the new seeding a better opportunity to become well established before being subjected to the rigors of intensive management.

Also important to the vigor, yield and life of the stand, and to the quality of the forage harvested, is adequate liming and fertilization plus control of insects and weeds.

It is more costly not to manage alfalfa, than it is to manage it well!

As we consider growing and harvesting higher quality, greater yielding forages, there is another concept we need to keep in mind. Is our main objective to reduce purchased feed costs, increase returns over feed costs, or to maximize net profit from the farm? In an effort to reduce purchased feed costs you may actually be reducing your total profits! Read that again! "How can this be?", you ask.

For example, if you own a small farm with limited acreage it will probably be less profitable to raise all your grain and forage in the interest of reducing purchased feed costs; chances are, you may not be able to support enough cows to earn a good livelihood for the family. It probably would be more profitable to raise only those crops which yield the greatest amount of feed nutrients per acre, such as corn for silage and high yielding alfalfa, and then buy necessary grain and protein; in this manner, more cows could be milked and net profits would probably increase, even though purchased feed costs are higher and returns over feed costs per cow - less. This is assuming that you would not have to borrow vast sums of money to build expensive facilities to accommodate the expanded herd.

On the other hand, if you have an abundant amount of acreage to work with and you are not interested in milking any more cows, than you would probably profit by growing as much of your feed as possible, increasing your returns over feed costs and reducing your dependence upon purchased feeds. Chances are, it will be more profitable for you to market as many of your crops as possible through cows, and selling the remainder for cash.

It is very difficult to make generalizations because every farm situation is unique in its own way. One thing is certain though, you can increase cash flow in the future by taking advantage of every opportunity now to grow and harvest top quality, high yielding forages, and then store and feed these forages in such a manner so as to make most efficient use of the quality and nutrients in the crops you have harvested.

Pa. wheat crop, hay stocks down

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania's 1981 winter wheat crop is expected to produce 8.25 million bushels from 250,000 acres based on May 1 conditions, according to the Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service.

If realized, the crop would be 11 percent below last year's state production. A lower anticipated yield of 33 bushels per acre is responsible for the smaller crop.

U.S. winter wheat production is forecast at a record high 2.08 billion bushels, ten percent above the 1980 crop.

Hay stocks on Pennsylvania farms May 1 were estimated at 795,000 tons, down 19 percent from a year ago. U.S. total hay stocks of 25.5 million tons were down 24 percent from last year.