

The Dairy Business

By
Newton Bair

Get ready for the alfalfa boom

How soon will the first cutting of alfalfa be ready to harvest? The answer is "soon", so get ready now. Plan to make the first cut as early as possible, whether it goes for hay or silage.

How early is early? The rule of thumb of 1/10 bloom, but this stage is not always apparent.

Another rule is cut when you can see the basal buds near the crown. I like that one better.

In southeastern Pennsylvania you can safely cut about May 17-25. Farther north, or at higher elevation, it may be a little bit later.

The main purpose of early cutting is for quality forage. We now have plenty of evidence from the Pennsylvania State Alfalfa program that early cut alfalfa tests about 20 percent crude protein — often as high as 22 percent, and total digestible nutrient (TDN) content also is highest at this time.

The payoff is not only in higher percentage of crude protein and TDN, but also higher total yield of these nutritional factors. There may be some loss of tonnage, but this is made up in higher quality.

Is the reduced tonnage from early cutting significant?

No it isn't. Our observations of the practices recorded by the top growers in the Penn State Alfalfa program have shown that by making the first cut early you will gain enough time to make an extra cut, also of high quality. Depending on your location, an extra cut may be a third, fourth or even a fifth harvest for the season.

What about spraying?

Forget about spraying the first growth of alfalfa. Some alfalfa weevil will probably be seen, but by the time you see very many, it's time to cut anyway. In most cases, when the first harvest is off, the weevil is already pupating and no longer a menace. If the weevil larva are still chewing when the first cut is off, spraying the stubble is very effective and cheaper than spraying a standing crop.

Whether you are praying or spraying, get on your knees for best results. Check things out of close range. If the larva are crawling and eating — spray. If they are still and pupating — don't. Nature will take care of them from here on, at no cost to you.

Leafhoppers

Don't worry too much yet about

the leafhopper. The experience of the last several years has been the leafhoppers arrive in full force on or after June 15, just in time to clobber the third crop of alfalfa.

If you don't have a sweep net, get one, or borrow one from your neighbor. Start sweeping your fields in early to mid-June to count leafhoppers.

Briefly, here is how you use a sweep net.

- ✓ Select at least 5 random sites in a field. As you sample a site, take a long step between each sweep.

- ✓ Make 20, 180 degree sweeps with the net at each site, sweeping 3 to 4 inches below the top of the plants.

- ✓ After 20 sweeps, swing the net back and forth several times, to force the insects into the small end of the bag.

- ✓ Count all the adults and nymphs of the leafhopper, and record.

After you sweep 5 sites, you can calculate the average number of insects per sweep. Example: If, after 20 sweeps of the net at 5 sites, you have collected a total of 60 hoppers, divide 60 by 100 = 0.6 hoppers per sweep.

If the population is high (50 or more in 20 sweeps) you can reduce the number of sweeps to save time.

Your decision on whether to spray depends on two things: the height of the alfalfa; and the average number of insects and nymphs per sweep.

For example, if you count 0.5 (one half) hopper per sweep of the net, and the alfalfa is only 6 inches high, spray immediately. If the alfalfa is 9 to 10 inches high at that count, resample again in 5 days. If the alfalfa is 12 inches or more in height, a count of 2 or more insects per sweep may justify spraying, but if it is only a week from harvest, cut instead of spraying. Then spray the next cutting.

Most serious damage to alfalfa from leafhopper occurs at the 4" to 10" stage of growth.

Quick tips on haymaking

Mow alfalfa early in the morning so it has all day to dry.

Rake in single windrows before noon the next day. Rake while hay is still tough, and don't be afraid to spend up so that the windrow is fluffy.

Avoid baling when the hay is bone dry. Best hay baling time is

late evening, after leaves begin to take on a little moisture.

Pray for rain while it's growing and sun while it's curing!

Acid preservatives do not improve the feeding quality of hay. Use only in situations where hay must be baled at high moisture (about 20 percent for legume hay).

For hay between 20 - 25 percent moisture, apply at least one-quarter actual propionic acid per 50 pound bale.

Jersey bred heifers attracts new buyers

MERCER — While some folks, these days, aren't enjoying the high prices dairy cattle brought a year or two ago, Pennsylvania Jersey breeders had a lot to smile about as this year's Bred Heifer Sale averaged more than last year. Held recently at the Mercer 4-H Park, 29 bred heifers averaged \$1,126 and grossed \$32,680, a contrast to last year's average of \$1,064.

Florence Robinson, secretary-treasurer for the Pennsylvania Jersey Cattle Club, explained that a lot of new buyers kept the bidding lively for the annual event.

Jane Moore of Franklin paid \$1,835 for the high-selling heifer. Consigned by New Wilmington dairymen Richard and Gerald Moose, Spring Run Earl Shasta is sired by Generator HL Earl and out of Spring Run QS Sheri, a high testing animal with records to 13,720 pounds of milk and 888 pounds of fat. The top-seller is due in June to Briarcliffs Black Magic.

Fredonia breeder Donald Koontz had the high bid of \$1,560 for a Briarcliffs Soldier Boy daughter. Bred by Soldier Boy Candace,

consigned by Thomas Williams of Middletown, is due to M.V.F. Banner Al and out of Bryncoed Cynthia Chura with records to 14,005 pounds of milk and 535 pounds of fat.

Walebe Samson Quincy commanded \$1,350 and got the bid from Dean Moose of New Wilmington. Consigned by Walebe Farms, Inc. of Collegeville, the heifer is sired by Gramhil Leader Sophia Samson and out of Walebe Mack Quince. The heifer is due to Briarcliffs Black Magic.

A Soldier Boy daughter, consigned by Joseph Shields of Summerville, also nailed down an \$1,350 bid. Debra Stoudt of Bernville purchased Briarcliffs Secret Laura who is out of Milestone Secret Dairy Mae. The heifer is due in July to Quicksilver Noble.

Hillcrest Jersey Farm of Volant donated a three-month-old calf to the sale. Celias Penny Pickles was purchased for \$400 by Michael Lusk of Charleroi. The young heifer is sired by Celias Master of Fallneva and out of MP Quicksilver Pansy Penny.



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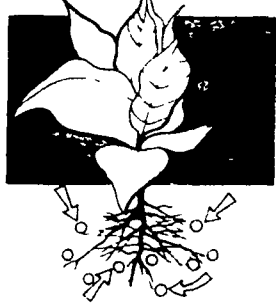
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- 10-20-20 6-24-24
- 20-10-10 32-0-10
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