

## Specialist Says Alfalfa Costs \$270-\$280 Per Acre

**BY MARJORIE KEEN**  
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GUTHRIESVILLE — On the average, the cost of growing alfalfa in Pennsylvania over the past six years has been \$270-\$280 an acre, according to Dr. Sid Bosworth, Penn State Extension Forage Specialist. In the southeastern part of the state, average crop yields are between six and six and one-half tons. Bosworth addressed 144 Chester County farmers on the economics of alfalfa production at Crops Day last Friday.

"Prorated establishment costs, which can't be ignored, run about \$40 an acre. The cost that has steadily and consistently been climbing over the last three years is machinery ownership," he said. Bosworth included machinery for harvesting, spraying and mowing and tractor costs for both establishment and maintenance.

"I want to make the point that

it's probably good to sit down and calculate what you're spending on your crops," Bosworth suggested. "I can give you average figures (from the Alfalfa Growers Program) but they may not apply at all to your program."

"The real challenge is to combine a good crop program with good dairy management," the specialist said. For high producing cows you have to have high quality forage, according to Bosworth, who added that you can't substitute grain for poor quality forage.

"When we look at the factor that influences cost and quality most, it's cutting management," said Bosworth. Cutting alfalfa pre-bloom is best, he stated. "Letting it go to flower or mid-bloom... we know we lose in protein concentration. Fiber goes up... and digestible dry matter goes down very dramatically... and as a result milk production can go down. When I think

of forage profitability, this is probably the first key."

Although midwestern research reports successful reseeding of alfalfa by killing or merely removing the tops of the previous crop in

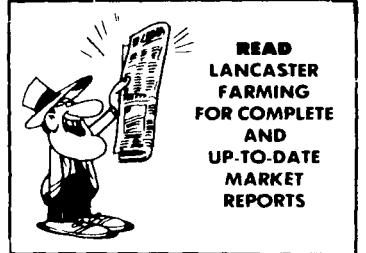
the fall, Bosworth advises continuing to rotate for a couple of years. "One of the top plant pathologists at Penn State is convinced that even though we can overcome (autotoxicity) we're not going to

overcome the problem of disease buildup."

Bosworth also outlined successful alfalfa establishment practices. Managing problem weeds and new herbicides for alfalfa and corn were topics covered by Dr. John Yocum, Penn State Senior Agronomy Research Associate. Penn State Extension Entomologist Dr. Dennis Calvin spoke on alfalfa insect control and also controlling insects in stored grain. Chester County Extension Dairy Agent David Swartz updated the farmers on chemical safety.



Extension Specialists John Yocum (L), Dennis Calvin (center) and Sid Bosworth (R) at Chester County Crops Day, Guthriesville.



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