

Alfalfa And Corn Yields Economically

Brubaker: "Insecticides—I don't need them. Crop rotation keeps the pests from establishing themselves. I scout corn fields every fall and I look for the eggs. I use to have someone do that for me, but he's not with the company I use anymore, so I do it myself. He did show me what to look for. I just make a sweep with a net to estimate the insect population out there."

I haven't used any insecticides for the last four years. Continuous cropping allows the insect to establish themselves. When you rotate every three or four years there's just no need to spray every year. And it is a costly item up to \$10 per acre. When you talk about 100 acres of corn you're talking a thousand dollars."

LF: How do you keep weeds down in the corn and alfalfa?

Brubaker: "Cultivating, as every good farmer knows, is still the best way to go. Cultivating aerates the soil and allows moisture into the soil. On the fields I have cultivated, I have noticed a three to five bushel yield increase. The problem is as a farmer grows more acres he has less time and face it, chemicals buy time when you use them. If you don't have the time to cultivate then you buy

chemicals and put them on to kill weeds."

I cultivate as time permits. I am not a fan of no-till for that reason. I don't like using a lot of chemicals. Now along the Eastern Shore that is an excellent area for using no-till. We have a heavier soils up here and I just wouldn't do it up here."

I don't use herbicides in my alfalfa because planting early gives the alfalfa a headstart to choke out any competition from weeds."

LF: Do you use any herbicides in your corn fields?

Brubaker: "If I use Atrazine, which I do sometimes, I never use as much as recommended because the carryover will kill your alfalfa. Bladex won't kill your alfalfa, but it is three times more expensive."

LF: How do you determine what your weed problems are?

Brubaker: "I examine every field as I harvest. I keep a tablet with me in my pocket and note or draw a map of the where the problem patch is. This is the only way that I can do it. I can't walk every row, but you've got to treat weeds to get rid of them."

Shattercane is the biggest problem. Birds eat the seeds and then deposit them every where. There is only one chemical to suppress it. You have to use it if you are going to grow corn, Eradicane-Extra at \$27 per acre.

This must be incorporated. It cannot be surface applied. So you have to hold off planting corn until mid-May. That's the problem with these noxious weeds."

LF: When do you make your first cutting and how important to potential yield and quality is that first cutting date?

Brubaker: "If I'm not done planting corn when it's time to cut hay, I stop planting corn and cut hay. Alfalfa is the kind of crop that sets your schedule for all summer long. A couple times I got out of sync and I said I'd never do it again."

Come the third week of May when it's in pre-bud to bud stage, and its nice weather, I cut hay. You've got to cut it then,

because you know it's going to rain soon. I mow hay in mid-May and I've kept a lot of records. I get five cuttings, cutting 30-32 days, have a good level of protein at 20 percent or better."

Not cutting hay at the right time on the first cutting messes everything up for the whole year."

LF: When do you make your last cutting?

Brubaker: "We usually get a killing frost early to mid October, but this year it didn't come to early November. I usually make my last cutting the early part of October, but this year it was the fifth or sixth of November. When I cut that late in the fall I leave a four to six inch stubble."

LF: Will that hurt your alfalfa stand cutting it that late into the season?

Brubaker: "Not if you keep your fertility up you won't hurt it with those late cuttings."

LF: How do you maintain your stand throughout the growing season?

Brubaker: "I put on two applications of fertilizer. One is applied after the first cutting of 400/lbs. per acre of 3/9/40. And one after the third cutting of 300 lbs./acre of 3/9/40."

LF: Do you use any other nutrient besides nitrogen, phosphate and potash?

Brubaker: "For the first time this year I put sulfur on the hay fields which works together with nitrogen and allows the nitrogen to be taken up and absorbed by the alfalfa plants more efficiently. It enhances the uptake of nitrogen. I think that is what helped me to get eight to ten tons this year. It's pretty much been between seven and eight tons, but this has been my best year for hay."

It is all fine tuned just like a race engine. You can get everything just right, but if you don't have the moisture, if you are not irrigating it's all up to Mother Nature and it's a big gamble."

LF: How did you select the variety you use now?

Brubaker: "I read a lot. I read the university research and the PSU trials on all the different brands. There are only seven strains of alfalfa they just get put in different packages. Some just did not work out for me. I would try different kinds on different fields. You get 40 acres to a bag and different fields might give me different results."

LF: What's your moisture level and method of storage?

Brubaker: "When I mow it down, I don't work up the hay a lot. Raking it and drying it helps lose a lot of the leaves. Your protein is in your leaves. In the Harvestore I can store it anywhere between 35 to 60 percent moisture. The optimum is 45 percent, but you are never right on the mark. I use some ag bags, too. Only on my baled hay do I use any preservatives."

LF: How do you decide what crops to plant and what to buy?

Brubaker: "Produce what you need, corn for energy and alfalfa for protein. I can buy oats cheaper than I can grow them. It is a business and you must take a business approach. You grow only what you need. If I can't grow it for what I can buy it for, I'm better off to buy it."



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