

# Management Is Tool To Uncover Alfalfa's Potential

QUARRYVILLE (Lancaster) — Among livestock producers, especially dairymen, alfalfa has a reputation that no other forage can match. It's known as the queen of forages and is an essential crop on most Northeastern farms.

But experts say farmers have been reluctant to take full advantage of alfalfa and manage it to its fullest potential.

"Alfalfa and many of our forage crops are neglected and receive only minimal attention," says Les Vough, forage crop extension specialist of the University of Maryland.

The lack of attention is attributed to the other demands on a farmer's time, he said.

"We need to look at alfalfa and recognize that it has great yield potential and is a very valuable crop," Vough said. Suggested methods to more effectively man-

age alfalfa were part of Vough's and other forage specialists presentations at a field day and open house at an alfalfa breeding station recently completed by Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., near Quarryville.

Vough strongly suggested farmers consider increased amounts of fertilizer, particularly potash to increase alfalfa yields. Results from a five year study showed that increased yields more than offset fertilizer costs.

"The greatest return occurred when we applied 430 pounds of potash. Typically, farmers in this region apply 100-125 pounds of potash," Vough said.

He also suggested an early first cutting would help increase yields.

"If you're two weeks behind on the first cutting that means you

have less time for regrowth as the season progresses. Depending on the year, it can make a real difference," Vough said.

Weather — specifically hot, dry weather — has pressured alfalfa and other crops this summer. Although these conditions could have an impact on crop yield there are practices farmers can use to adapt to the conditions, said Bill Fleet, Pioneer agronomy services manager.

"Harvest timing is one of the most important factors to consider when drought conditions hit," Fleet said.

"The plant may look differently, almost like nothing is happening, but it is only adapting to the situation. It still requires management techniques that will optimize yield and quality while helping the stand

persist," Fleet said.

Other speakers at the field day included Dennis Calvin, Pennsylvania State University; Vance York, Pioneer alfalfa product coordinator; Tim Woodward, director of Pioneer alfalfa breeding department; Dave Jessen, Quarryville station manager; and Ed Poyner, Quarryville station assistant manager.

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