

High-Quality Alfalfa

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... the need for insecticides to control weevil and can have a positive effect on alfalfa yield and quality on the next crop by reducing certain weeds."

Lacefield recommends harvesting at bud stage on established stands and at first flower on new stands.

Cuttings per season

The number of cuttings per season depends not only on the date of the first harvest but also on when freezing occurs in fall and the region's water availability and temperature. The total number of potential harvests can vary from six to 10 under irrigation in the Southwest and Deep South to only one or two in the North. In the Mid-Atlantic and Eastern regions, cuttings per year range from three to five.

Studies done in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Iowa have shown that cutting alfalfa on an intensive schedule can produce high yields and high quality. But, "stand persistence is often shortened on the most intensive cutting schedule," Lacefield pointed out. A study by Minnesota researchers found, however, that a long rest period either mid summer or fall used with a four-cut system resulted in a reasonable stand persistence after three years of harvest.

Traditionally alfalfa experts discouraged a harvest during the four to six weeks before the first killing

frost. But due to advancements in new varieties, fertility programs, pest control, and management strategies, this practice is being questioned and studied further. "The concept of a fall "critical period" is not always valid," said Lacefield, "particularly when a winter-dormant, disease-resistant variety is used and soil fertility is high."

Grazing the alfalfa is an alternative that should be considered when drawing up a cutting schedule. It has not been popular in the United States, although other countries do it quite a bit. American farmers who did put their stock out on alfalfa had them graze weedy or dormant stands.

The advantages to grazing alfalfa are that the animal will consume a higher-quality alfalfa and that high gains per animal can be achieved. "But in order to get high gains, you must graze animals with the ability to grow," Lacefield stressed.

Steers grazing on alfalfa can gain as much as 2.40 pounds per day, and an acre of alfalfa can produce as much as 1,000 pounds.

Fences are a must when grazing alfalfa. Farmers needn't erect big fences, just something to show the animal its boundaries, according to Lacefield. He also recommended starting with five paddocks for the first year. Paddocks should be grazed one week and rested for four to five weeks. "You should have a "sacrifice paddock" that you can move animals to in case of heavy rain,"

he added. This paddock, which would save the alfalfa field from becoming torn up by animals after a heavy rain, could be of almost any lesser-quality forage.

Grazing alfalfa is a problem because it does require moving cattle and erecting fences, but the gains outweigh these, Lacefield believes. Another problem is bloating, which probably has kept many farmers from using alfalfa for grazing.

"Bloating is a serious problem if it's on your farm," Lacefield said. "But farmers have lost more money from the fear of bloating than from bloating. If an animal dies in or near an alfalfa field, don't blame it on the alfalfa automatically."

Bloating incidences can be reduced or avoided by growing grass with the alfalfa, grazing animals only on dry alfalfa, and feeding the animals before turning them out to pasture. In addition, there are materials on the market that help prevent bloating.

On farms where alfalfa is needed as hay, grazing can be factored into the cutting schedule. "Systems of grazing early spring growth provide quality feed and delay the first hay harvest until more favorable weather," said Lacefield. "Other systems provide for grazing during mid summer when cool-season grasses often are unproductive."

A Kentucky research study showed very little yield differences with grazing in a four-cut system when the grazing periods were altered.

High-quality alfalfa is important to many livestock operations. A carefully considered cutting schedule can help farmers optimize both the yield and quality of their alfalfa.

Lancaster Conservation

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sedimentation. Those recognized for their work were Horst & Huffman of Lancaster, developers; Rettew Associates of Lancaster, engineers; B.R. Krieder Sons Inc. of Manheim, excavating contractors; and West Hempfield Township Municipal officials.

A special award went to those involved in the Lancaster County Solid Waste Management Authority. Called the Outstanding Public Service Project Award, the recognition was presented for implementing good erosion and sediment pollution controls on the access road and Fry farm land-fill construction project in Manor Township. Those receiving the award were the LCSWMA, Leon E. Wintermyer Inc. of Conestoga, excavators; Hart Engineers Inc. of Cresswell, engineers; and Manor Township Municipal officials.

Herr currently owns three farms with a total of 460 acres, 360 of which are tillable. He has worked closely with the Conservation District over the years and now is very close to being finished installing conservation measures. Herr is currently under his fourth long-term agreement.

"Instead of doing everything in one year, I do something every

year," he explained. "It helps with my cash flow." Over the last 11 years, Herr and the Conservation District have installed 3,800 feet of sod waterways, 8,700 feet of diversion terraces, 14,900 feet of cropland terraces, and 6,85 feet of sub-surface drainage. He predicts it will take another three to four years before he is done. Among the things he wants to do is convert a diversion to a pipe-outlet terrace and install spring-fed pools in a couple pastures for the cows to keep them out of the streams.

Herr, who is aided by his wife, Fay, and son, Dale, stores manure from his 105-cow, 110-heifer herd in an earthen bank storage area, which holds about a six-month supply. Using soil and manure samples he has worked out his own nutrient-management plan with the help of his fertilizer salesman. He takes soil samples in the fall so that he can apply lime at that time should he need it.

Corn and alfalfa hay are grown at the home farm, while corn, barley, and soybeans are grown at the other farms. He plants using a minimum or no-till system and applies manure as a liquid. Rye follows corn as a cover crop and late soybeans follow the barley. Pesticides are kept to a minimum by rotating crops.



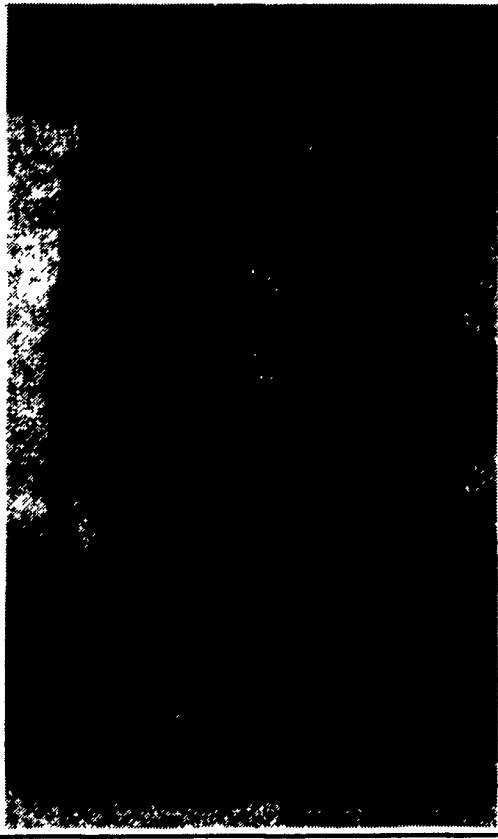
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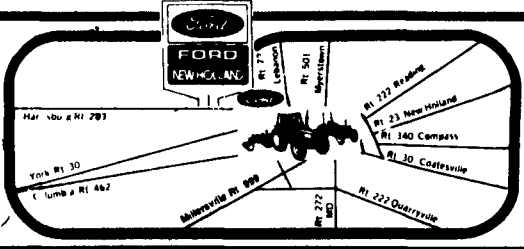
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