

# Cutting Alfalfa In The Fall?

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The goal of most forage programs is to maximize economic yield of nutrients while ensuring stand persistence. Fall harvesting of alfalfa is a key management decision in the quest for optimum economic performance. Decisions on fall cutting should be made based on a sound understanding of

how a plant grows and survives. During the late summer and early fall, alfalfa plants are preparing for winter by developing cold resistance and storing energy reserves in their roots. Depending on the timing, fall harvest may interfere with this process. Harvesting alfalfa at a time that will allow only a few weeks of regrowth before the herbage is

killed by frost will greatly reduce energy reserves in the roots. Harvesting will also remove stubble which catches snow and serves as a layer of insulation from extremely cold air temperatures. Both of these situations increase the risk of alfalfa winter kill.

Winter environmental conditions can aggravate the effects of fall harvesting. Temperatures of 5° F will injure alfalfa crowns and roots. Soil and snow serve as insulation between the alfalfa plant and cold air temperatures. Lack of snow increases the risk of winter kill. Wet soils will freeze and thaw more intensively, which will increase the amount of frost heaving. Don't fall-harvest fields that have a history of frost heaving or

accumulating little snow cover.

Risks to stand persistence can be minimized by:

- Taking at least one harvest during the summer at 1/10 bloom or greater.

- Fall harvesting young stands because young stands are less susceptible to winter injury.

- Maintaining high soil fertility levels.

- Fall harvest alfalfa varieties that have good disease resistance and winterhardiness.

Although fall harvesting increases the risk to stand loss compared with not fall harvesting, the need for forage or the value of the forage may be greater than the risk. Making the decision to cut in the late summer or fall requires

weighing the risk of winter injury against the need for the forage. Use the scoring system in Table 1 to assess the risk of late summer or fall harvesting alfalfa.

Optimum levels of potassium in the soil enhance the storage of energy reserves in alfalfa roots. High reserves of energy in the roots as winter begins improve the ability of alfalfa to overwinter and support good spring growth. It is important that adequate potassium be available during the late summer and early fall since the storage of energy reserves for winter survival occurs during this time. Applying potassium fertilizer after the plants go dormant for the winter does not benefit energy reserve storage.

## Dorset Day Held

LEBANON, N.J. — The 8th Annual Dorset Field Day was held on Saturday, September 25 at the Perry Farm, Whitehouse Station, N.J.

A pair of horned Dorset ewes met the arrivals, one ewe with her one-day-old twins, the second with her 4-day-old youngster. Further up the farm path, barbecued lamb bits, lamb meatballs, lamb chile, cookies, and coffee provided refreshments for all.

A local "custom butcher" displayed the packaged cuts of meat obtained from a lamb, with descriptions of various other cuts

of meat, and suggestions on how they could be prepared for the dinner table.

Further along, a young ram lamb held his position on a fitting table as he was "finished" for a show. Over in an adjoining field, several 4-H'ers were demonstrating how to show animals, and receiving fine points relative to set-up and positioning.

A display of poisonous and nuisance plants, common to fields and pastures, was available for review, complete with "land-out" data on pasture management and care.

## Beef Show, Sale Set

WOODSTOWN, N.J. — On Saturday, October 23, the Salem County 4-H Beef Project members will hold their first annual Fall 4-H Beef Show & Sale at the Salem County Fairgrounds.

The beef show, start-

ing at 10:30 a.m., will feature the beef animals raised by the County Corners 4-H Club members for their 1992-1993 4-H beef projects. Following the beef show, at 1 p.m., the animals will be auctioned to bidders

by Grant Harris. This will be the final reward for the 4-H members involved.

The money received from the sale of their animals will enable them to purchase a calf for next year's project, and to put the profit, if

any, into savings for future education. Preceding the beef sale will be an appreciation luncheon for any and all prospective buyers, interested persons, and 4-H supporters.

The 4-H beef project begins in September or October when each 4-H'er selects and purchases a 500-pound market calf to raise until its sale in mid-October of the following year. 4-H members ranging in age from 9-19 spend many hours with daily feeding, grooming, and care. The 4-H'er must also halter-break and teach the steer to lead and stand correctly for shows. In addition, the member is also responsible for keeping financial and production records, as well as the animal's health. The end result of 13 months of hard work is the highest quality market steer, weighing between 1,100 and 1,400 pounds.

For more information, contact Stacey Coles at (609) 769-1485, Sharon Coleman at (609) 358-3346, Yankee Eller at (609) 358-3297, Annette Devitt at (609) 769-0090, or Doreen Tucker at (609) 769-3694.

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