

Franklin County Farmer Grows Quality Alfalfa To Easily Meet Nutrition Needs

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on his 125 acres of alfalfa.

Gayman and his wife Sally farm 400 acres in Waynesboro, where they milk 140 registered Holsteins. The alfalfa haylage is a key part of their dairy ration, making up 60 percent of the forage base, which accounts for about 52 percent of the ration.

The Gaymans generally get about four cuttings off their alfalfa stands each year, which they keep for four years. In the fifth year, the first cutting is harvested and the stand is planted into corn.

"I generally don't push too hard to get a fifth cutting," said Gayman. "I like to see a little growth there at the end of the summer to help if we get a heavy snow or anything."

"We like to see between 18 and 20 percent protein with our alfalfa," he said. "That generally has a relative feed value of 130 to 140 percent, and it is easier to feed that way."

When the relative feed value goes higher than 140, as it did with last year's fifth cutting, the Gaymans have difficulty balancing the ration.

"We're feeding our fifth cutting right now, and it's testing at 22 percent," said Gayman. "We're running into fiber problems because the relative feed value is too high."

The quality of Gayman's alfalfa haylage is essential to his feeding

strategy. "Your bought feeds are cheaper with high quality haylage," said Gayman. "You don't have to buy a lot of protein, and minerals are cheaper."

"It is much easier to balance rations with good roughages than with grains," he said. "It's easier to get milk out of the cows, too."

Gayman's herd, which has the prefix, "Gaymere," averages 23,000 pounds of milk on two times a day test with 4.0 percent fat and 3.2 percent protein.

Gayman has been farming most of his life. He took over the farm in 1990 after farming in a partnership with his father Harold and brother Grant from 1978-1990, when his father decided to retire and his brother took a job as a milk inspector at Maryland and Virginia Milk Cooperative Association.

His father purchased the farm in 1960 when Gayman was in second grade. "The farm we lived on was split by Route 81, and we had 20 acres on the other side of the road that were difficult to get to," said Gayman. "My dad's criteria for purchasing a farm was that it should not have as many rocks as the Greencastle farm."

Gayman's farm doesn't have as many rocks. In fact, the soil quality is very good, according to Gayman. It is mainly Hagerstown loam soil

with a little bit of Duffy in it.

The alfalfa is fertilized with a liquid 10-20-10 commercial fertilizer on the second and third cutting. About every three years the Gaymans apply lime to all of their ground.

"We generally get about seven to eight tons of alfalfa on a hay equivalent basis each year," said Gayman. "We used to participate in the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council's alfalfa yield program, and we had the top yield one year of more than 8½ tons per acre."

Although the Gaymans haven't tried any leafhopper resistant varieties on the majority of their alfalfa ground, they do have a couple of test plots that Penn State is monitoring.

"We got involved with the test plots through cooperative extension," said Gayman. "They planted three plots this year and two last year. The university comes out to do yield checks every time I cut it."

In addition to growing alfalfa, the Gaymans also grow corn and barley. "We use corn in our rotation," said Gayman. "After the first cutting of alfalfa is taken off in the fifth year, we plant it in corn silage. We also have 20 acres of barley that we mainly use for straw."

According to Gayman, he does better planting corn than he ever did planting soybeans. "Last year, even with the drought, we got 32 loads off of the corn silage that was double-

cropped behind the barley," he said. "It looked terrible, but it waited out the dry weather and produced a crop."

In addition to his traditional crops, Gayman also plants a couple of rows of Indian corn. "You can really see how the hybrids have helped us on a dry year," he said. "The Indian corn just doesn't do anything. But, on a normal year, it really doesn't show that much with all of the fertility and soil samples that we do."

Both the corn silage and the haylage are stored in bunker silos on Gaymere Farm. According to Gayman, it's easier to get in and out of a bunker. There are also less delays because of breakdowns than with upright silos.

"If an unloader breaks down, we just get one of the other tractors with an unloader."

The Gaymans also like the trenches because they're not cutting up the silage any more that it already is. "We're concerned about the length of cut," said Gayman, who recently identified a low rumen pH problem in his herd.

"The nutritionist has to see the length of cut at between ¾ to 1-inch long, and apparently I cut it too fine," said Gayman. "It packs tighter when it's finer, but I need to change my ways."

Even though the component levels in the milk were still high, the Gaymans had a lot of breeding and sore feet problems. "We need to work on that," said Gayman. "The nutritionist plans to be here when I

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