

MACHINERY TRAFFIC SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCES ALFALFA YIELDS
 Jim Moutray
 America's Alfalfa

Recent U.S. studies show that traffic on alfalfa fields reduces yields much more than anyone previously thought.

A few years ago, faced with the problem of soil types that cause early stand thinning under machine traffic, researchers in northern Japan had the idea to try alfalfa developed in America under continu-

ous grazing by cattle. They theorized that alfalfas that would withstand abuse from hoof traffic associated with constant grazing throughout the growing season might maintain stands longer.

They obtained some interesting results after three years of running a tractor over the plots after each harvest to simulate cutting, raking, and chopping. These are:

- In the third year of the test, the American grazing tolerant varieties yielded up to 250 percent more than the regular varieties bred in the U.S.

- At the end of the test, the grazing tolerant varieties had three times as many plants per square foot

left the following spring.

- Stands of the grazing tolerant varieties were good enough to keep for another year's production of dairy quality hay, while stands of the regular varieties had large holes with weed invasion and were too poor to keep.

- The grazing tolerant varieties America's Alfalfa develops are also traffic tolerant.

In 2000, the University of Wisconsin initiated a test of 20 varieties in duplicate side-by-side research plots. In one set of plots, a tractor was driven over each row three times, five days after each harvest. The other set of plots was harvested without running over them.

The average yield reduction in the seeding year was more than 40 percent, with typical on-farm wheel traffic.

In this test, America's Alfalfa grazing and traffic tolerant varieties were the highest yielders with or without traffic.


These plots will be continued for two more years. In 2001 and 2002, we expect a large yield difference between the traffic-tolerant varieties and those developed without traffic (frequent hoof traffic and defoliation) as occurred in the earlier study.

This "real world" testing is revealing the importance of wheel traffic on fields. What can be done about it:

- Strongly consider varieties that are traffic tested.


- Avoid unnecessary trips across the field by combining operations when possible.

- Finish driving on fields as soon as possible after cutting. Longer delays will damage regrowth more.



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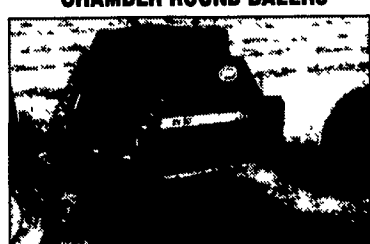


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RV187L	4'x2' to 4'x6'	84"	Twine, Twine & Net

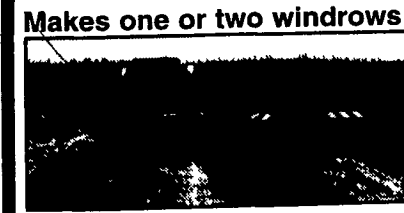
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