

Don't 'Baby' Alfalfa During Seeding Year

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Yield and persistence were once the primary concerns of producers, and cutting at full flower was a common practice. However, with the release of multidisease resistant varieties which have a broad range in dormancy levels, producers have considerable flexibility in choosing a harvest management strategy to meet their needs.

Harvest of alfalfa that is spring-

seeded without a companion crop should not be delayed in an attempt to improve persistence. Young alfalfa stands (seeding year) are capable of persisting under more severe harvest management practices than older alfalfa stands.

Cutting of alfalfa 40 days after seeding does not lower stand persistence compared to cutting 80 days after seeding. Timing of the first harvest after seeding, however, does effect alfalfa yield and quality. Harvesting the newly seeded alfalfa between the bud and 10 percent bloom

stage of development produces the greatest dry matter and quality yield.

Harvesting earlier produces less dry matter and harvesting later results in less nutrient yield per acre. If soil fertility is optimum, the stand appears healthy, and a highly-disease resistant variety of alfalfa was seeded, then harvesting at the bud stage should be considered as a harvest management option.

When a companion crop is spring-seeded with the alfalfa, harvesting of the companion crop dic-

tates the timing of the initial alfalfa harvest. Alfalfa seeded during late summer or early fall is usually well established by the following spring and can be subjected to the same harvest regime as established alfalfa.

Cutting alfalfa for the first time at a stubble height greater than three-to five-inches does not improve persistence, but does lower yield. Yield reductions of approximately 35 percent are reported when alfalfa is cut at nine-inch compared to three-inch stubble height.



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Graziers Learn Management

(Continued from Page 19)

farm, with 270 acres in grass. The rented acreage yields corn silage and alfalfa haylage for the operation.

Hertzler started out buying two Dutch Belted cattle for his wife as a gift, which grew a year later when she purchased more animals ready to calve.

Hertzler purchased his Perry County farm in 1978 and built an 80-cow free-stall barn. In 1993, the Hertzler family started looking at opportunities to become more profitable.

By then they were farming 1,000 acres, putting in 16-hour days, dealing with herd health problems, high

somatic cell counts, and considering equipment replacement.

Because several people suggested grazing, the Hertzlers began to take the idea seriously. After visiting a grazing operation in December of 1993, they were convinced of the potential of farming on a grass-based operation. They began implementing their own grassland operation almost immediately and were ready to graze by April.

Since then, they have met goals such as buying less protein, feeding less grain, lowering the somatic cell count, improving herd health and reproduction, identifying heat detection more easily, decreasing cull rate, and enjoying a less stressful workday.

"We found that farming was less of a science and more of an art," said Hertzler. "For example, it's not up to the feed salesman but up to me to know when to change the fences."

Ken King, Kansas

Kenneth King, Hutchinson, Kan., is the owner and manager of "JaKo," a family corporation. The King family milks 75 head of cattle and owns 300 acres, 300 of which are in grass. Erosion problems on the Kansas plain helped to lead to the grassland operation.

King's opening audience-participatory demonstration with rubber bands illustrated that most people think along inhibited lines. "Don't make assumptions," he said. "Be creative."

"Have you ever told your kids, 'stop dreaming and get to work?'" he asked. "Have you ever spent a day helping your kids fulfill their dreams?"

"I propose that when we develop our children's hands — which develop on their own anyway — instead of developing their minds — which takes creative attention to develop — then we lose out on a wonderful opportunity and resource."

"For too long in my life I've used my hands, scooping feed. It was when I spent time on the fence posts, observing my cows, that my life changed."

"I'm not downplaying or criticizing working with your hands," he said. But working with your hands comes naturally, and you have got to cultivate your mind, whether yours, or your children's, or your employees'.

"You don't need to produce more than your neighbor to be competitive, you just have to produce more efficiently, or have a better marketing strategy."

King outlined resourceful strategies, from a polytape cattle guard which allows vehicles to drive over, to an insulated water tank made from a 30-gallon drum inside a 55-gallon drum and surrounded with styrofoam.

The calves, born in early April, nurse on their mothers until they are 3-4 months old, and then they are weaned by simply being placed in an adjoining pasture.

Spend time trying to optimize, he said, and consider your resources, such as land, cattle, or customers. Even problems can be resources, as problems can be turned into assets. "The only limiting factor to resources is our minds," he said.

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