



ADVANCED AG SYSTEMS'S

Crop Soil News

<http://www.advancedagsys.com/>

May 2011

"It is the crops that feed the cows that make the milk which creates the money."

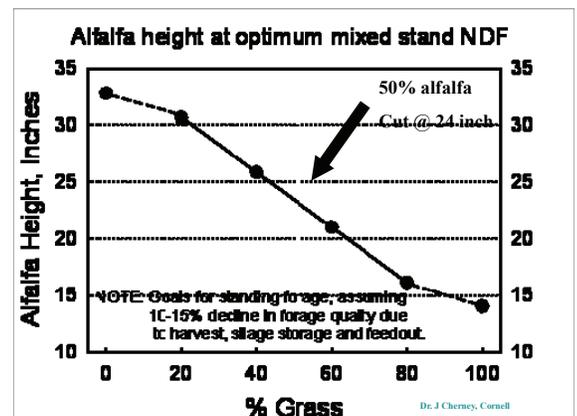
Dealing with The Wet

The Northeast US and Canada are sitting under their own personal rain cloud. A number of farms are facing a corn crop half planted and hay crop ready to harvest and little or no sun in the forecast. The more successful farms are using one pass minimum tillage or one pass deep zone tillage that is set for shallow (6 inch) depth. That allowed them to slip in acreage on the few sunny days. Those who took advantage of fall killing their sods are successfully no till planting. We are now at or approaching decision time. That is where the forage quality of the first cutting, and the corn to be planted yet, intersect. As it says in the Bible "there is a time for everything." The time for planting corn has gone by for most areas, and that needs to get regulated to catch-when-we-can, status. In every evaluation I and others have done, the maximum profit and minimum loss is to harvest the first cutting when it is at peak. **Each day you delay hay harvest increases NDF ½ to one point which removes \$4,000 of profit.** This is enough to buy 100 tons of additional corn silage.



As mentioned in the last newsletter, the first crop that is ready is the winter grains. Harvested at stage 9 where the flag leaf has just emerged, is higher milk/ton (4200) feed value than the excellent (3800) milk/ton BMR corn we use. To get this heavy crop dry for silage you will need to wide swath **and** use a tedder. There is 60% less available water under a winter grain and so this may be the driest fields you have.

The next crops to reach peak quality are the straight or nearly straight grass fields. Harvested when the nearby alfalfa is 13 – 15 inches tall, it has the same or better milk producing ability as high quality alfalfa. For our area (Albany NY) the grass has just gone by and by the time it stops raining, will be over the hill. Let it go, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear; you can't make high quality forage out of over-the-hill forage. Harvest that later for heifers and dry cows. Go on to the next crop to hit peak, the alfalfa grass mixes. They are approaching peak and if the weather breaks this weekend, an effort should be made to get them in. Follow that by harvesting fields with progressively more alfalfa, finishing with clear alfalfa. (see graph at right from Dr. Cherney, Cornell University).



Advanced Ag Systems
Research, Education, Consulting

This is the year to switch to true (85% of cutter bar) wide swath if you haven't already.

Drying is going to be severely compromised by the lack of sunlight and the excessively wet soil surface. Traditional mowing into a narrow swath will simply make **windrow composting** out of your haylage. We are only going to get short, often one day windows to get forage in. In 2006 we had a wet spring and in the 2 week harvest window had one opportunity where it was sunny two days in the row for traditional haylage. There were 5 single days in that same time to make same-day haylage. Using same day haylage technique is going to be critical this year.

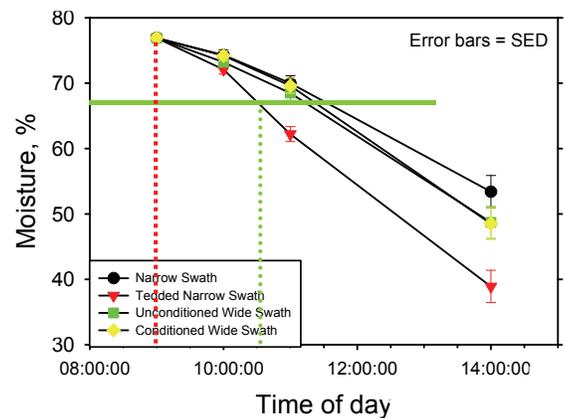
Move the Cutter Bar UP

To many of the disk mowers are set to scalp the ground and leave little or no stubble. Raising the cutter bar to leave a stubble will get the crop out of the mud and allow more air to move around it for drying. For every inch you raise, you leave about 300 lbs of dry matter in an alfalfa field. What you leave is the least digestible part of the plant. In fact, if you miss the optimum cutting height for clear alfalfa of 30 – 32 inches, you can recover and improve forage quality by raising the cutter bar to take only the top 32 inches of the alfalfa. This does NOT work with grass but a higher stubble on grass will regrow quicker to allow you to remove the old low quality forage that got by, and speed the growth of second cutting (if you added more N to grow the second cutting) that can be high quality.

Swaths greater than 85% of cutter bar are going to be critical for drying. The vast majority of farms still do not have a mower that will leave a swath a **minimum of 85% of cutter bar width**. If yours does not, you are not doing wide swath, but something less than that with disappointing results. Mowers are expensive and few farms have recovered from the low milk price of the past couple of years. What farms do have are **tedders**. Excellent work by Dr. Cherney, at Cornell, found that tedding shortly after mowing will spread the swath to a full wide swath and dramatically increase the drying rate (see graph at right).

Tedders are going to be a **key tool this year** as it appears there will not be many days with sufficient sunshine which is critical to rapidly removing moisture to make haylage. Bringing the lower layers up and spreading the swath to maximize the interception of the sunlight we do have is going to be vital. By raising the cutter bar, the stubble will be higher and so the tedder does not need to be set to dig in the ground and bring up the stones. When you rake or merge tedded swaths back to a row for chopping, the less the tines have to dig in the dirt, the less stones in the chopper.

The other critical reason to finally make the switch to true wide-swath, is the **increase in energy in the forage** you do harvest. Wide swathing (more than 85% of cutter bar) will continue to add digestible sugar and starch compared to traditional narrow swath that immediately starts losing it by respiration. The Net Energy of Lactation often goes from .54-.57 to .65 – .70 in wide swath. Using the conservative numbers for a **100 cow farm** with 275 acres of alfalfa, it translates into over **\$25,000 worth of energy that you do NOT have to buy as corn grain**. This is money that stays in your pocket rather than getting shipped to the Midwest.



Sincerely,

Thomas Kilcer,
Certified Crop Advisor

172 Sunnyside Rd
Kinderhook, NY
12106

Tel: 518-421-2132

tfk1@cornell.edu

**The Helping
Hand
to Better
Agriculture**

