



ADVANCED AG SYSTEMS'S

Crop Soil News

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

April 2012

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

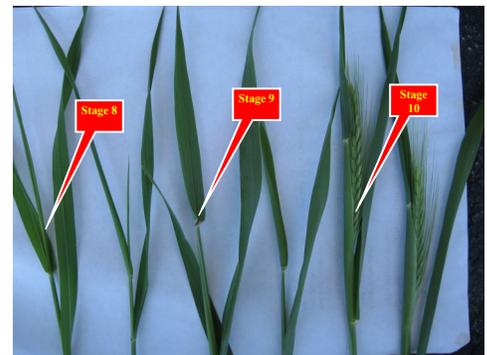
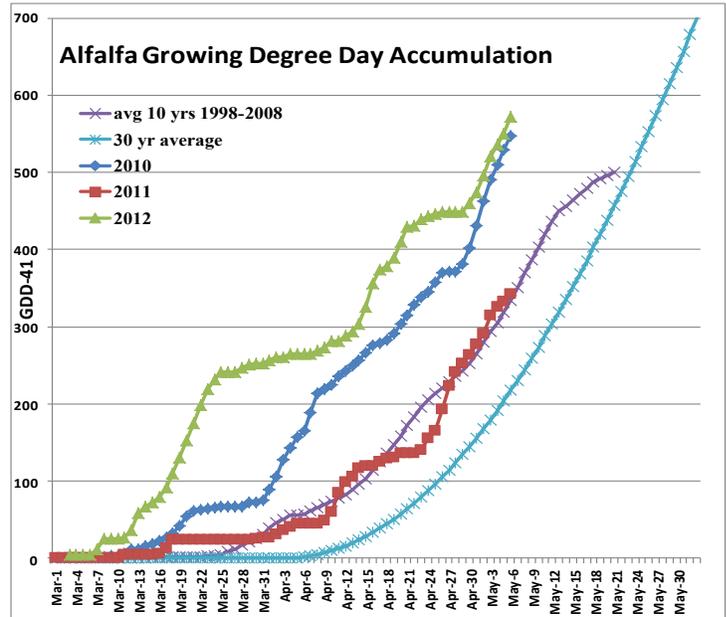
2012 Haycrop/Planting Season = Sum of Extremes.

The 2012 season in the Northeast has started out with a bang. From a March that brought 80°F and 23 F a week later; and April that hit 90 and 29 in three days; it has been a rollercoaster. We had less than a 1/3 of an inch of rain for all of March and up to April 21. Plants started to grow fast and then were frozen off. Growth of all crops slowed to a halt as they ran out of water. The recent rain spurred rapid growth which nearly halted in the cold weather since April 20.

For a number of farms the early growth means earlier harvest of cool season crops—which if you are short on forage, is a real savior. The cold temperatures, especially at night are keeping forage quality very high. Unfortunately, yields are expected to be much lower because the dry weather is severely limiting plant growth even with the rain and foot of snow last week.

This is making a real challenge of predicting when the hay will be at optimum quality for harvest. The graph on the right shows that we have had record early warmth, that came to a screeching halt with the snow and cold temperature of the past week. Over all it appears that we will be on track for the early season of 2010 where yields were also below normal because of dryness and very high forage quality because of the cold nights. Thus based on heat units, clear alfalfa will be generally ready around our area (south of Albany NY) about May 15 to the 18 (cool weather predicted after the next warm shot). Grasses will be similar to 2010 where they were ready by May 10 to the 15. In short, the season is **running 2 weeks earlier than normal—but without the yield due to the dryness.**

This is supported by the other indicator, winter grain forage. Triticale has reached stage 9, or flag leaf stage (see photo at right). This normally occurs just before the cool season grasses are ready. Normally we are harvesting May 18—20 for triticale. In 2010 we



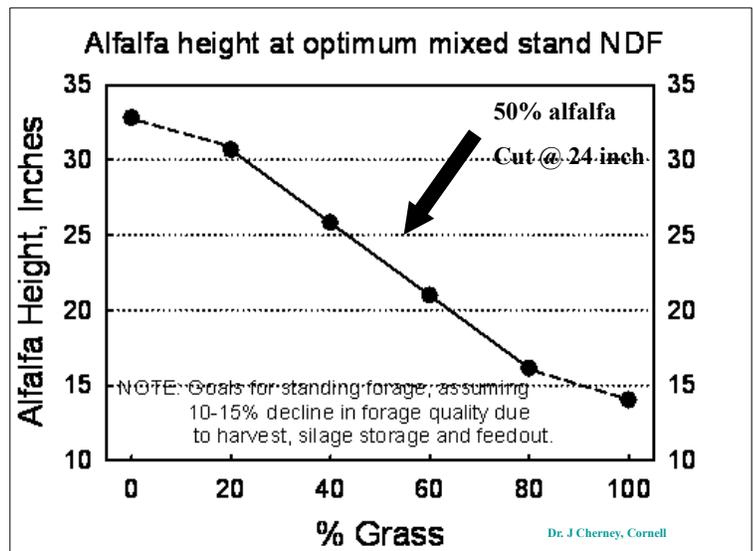
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harvested May 11 and were a little late. Interestingly, both the early planting date (September 16) and the late planting date (October 5) are at flag leaf stage. The difference is that the early plant date is 26 inches tall while the later is 16 inches tall. With the cool temperatures, wide swathing and tedding the winter grain forage is going to be critical for drying in same day haylage system.

The more accurate predictor of when to harvest optimum forage quality, and one that you can use to make a field by field determination; was developed by Dr. Cherney of Cornell University (<http://www.forages.org>). This is where we use alfalfa as a phenological predictor of when the grass and alfalfa grass mixes will be ready on an NDF basis. When alfalfa in a field of 90% grass, is 14 to 15 inches tall, it is time to cut it. When alfalfa in a 50% alfalfa field is 24 inches tall it is time to cut.

This carefully documented system that has worked so well the past 8—10 years, is under several countervailing forces this season. First, hard freezing has removed some of the height of the alfalfa in some areas; so the height may be behind the growing degree accumulation it normally predicts. Second, the grass is more immature due to the very cold nights producing very high digestibility. Third, there appears to be a bigger than normal “site effect”. This is where north facing fields are much further behind the south facing ones. We have had cool but sunny days that accelerate warm, south facing fields while northern facing fields are delayed.

The upshot is as Dr. Cherney of Cornell University states, “ *It is quite possible that alfalfa max height will have a different relationship with grass quality, compared to “normal” years, making a mess of our NDF prediction equations.*” I would still suggest using the system as it gives you a prediction on YOUR farm under YOUR conditions; not some average over wide areas. As I mentioned above, it also allows you to target the early fields that are ready and skip the ones that are behind so they can get more growth.



So for 2012 it looks again like we will be **harvesting** winter forage and cool season grasses **before we get our corn planted**. This will be a real help for those who are short on forage and put nitrogen on their grasses. As for the corn, don't panic. The soil temperatures have dropped to the upper 40 F so corn is not going to grow much anyway. The early corn is just peaking through the ground and is a sick yellow but will recover when the temperature jumps later this week. As in 2011, I think corn planted later this year will come out of the ground faster, and possibly do better than the early plant stuff; so don't hesitate to stop corn planting in order to get your very high quality early haylage harvested.

Sincerely,

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