Alfalfa Scissor’s Cut Harvest Alert Plans for 2012

The Central Minnesota Forage Council, Extension Staff and cooperating farmers and agribusiness people will be taking scissors cut alfalfa samples and PEAQ stick readings again in 2012. Sites are being arranged in Stearns, Benton, Morrison, and Wright Counties. There are also sites in Carver, Scott, Meeker and McLeod Counties.

The first samples are taken when the alfalfa is about 16 inches tall. This could be during the week of April 30 in southern locations. Samples will be taken on Mondays and Thursdays until the field is harvested. Questions about this project in Stearns, Benton and Morrison Counties can be referred to Extension Educator Dan Martens at 1-800-964-4929 or 968-5077 if a local call to Foley. For information in Carver and Scott counties, call Laura Kieser at 952-466-5300; and in Meeker and McLeod call Nathan Winter at 320-484-4334.

INFORMATION will be shared by radio, website, and a call-in phone message.

1) For radio, check KASM 1150 AM from Albany (about 7:30 a.m.) and from Little Falls 960 AM and WYRQ 92.1.


3) A phone message report can be heard by calling the Benton County Extension Office at 968-5077 if a local call to Foley or 1-800-964-4929. When the phone is answered enter 5081.

4) Laura Kieser is also posting the Carver/Scott County data at https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AvW0h0gULtZVdFEyUTdBOW1PTHTHhITkZTVSlrTnc

For information about using alfalfa scissors cut sampling or PEAQ readings go to:
http://www.extension.umn.edu/forages. There are articles for using these tools with alfalfa and with alfalfa grass mix crops and a link to the Minnesota Crop News site. You’re welcome to request copies of articles that tell about using this in your fields.

Harvesting correct quality alfalfa and other forage corps lays the foundation for rations that support efficient milk production in dairy cows and other livestock enterprises. Forage growers and agronomy and nutrition advisors can use a several tools and strategies for gauging the growth and
maturity of the alfalfa crop for harvest decisions. Present and past experiences are good indicators of whether strategies are working well on individual farms or whether some adjustments might be useful.

PEAQ means “predictive equation for alfalfa quality” based on the height and maturity. A “PEAQ” stick was developed at University of Wisconsin - marked for RFV (relative feed value) or RFQ (relative feed quality) related to height and vegetative, bud, and blossom stages. We usually start checking fields when the crop is about 16 inches tall. PEAQ sticks can be purchased through the Midwest Forage Association website www.midwestforage.org or by calling 651-484-3888.

For scissors cut sampling, take a fresh cut sample at random locations in an alfalfa field and have the sample analyzed at a forage testing lab. The recommendation is to take at least 3 samples at 3 to 4 day intervals ahead of when the alfalfa might be cut to estimate a trend for how the crop is developing. This means starting about two weeks ahead of expected harvest. Cutting decisions are based on NDF (neutral detergent fiber), RFV, or RFQ targets.

Field to Feed Manger Loss. NDF of alfalfa in the feed manger is generally 3 to 6 percentage units higher than a fresh cut sample because of harvest and storage losses. To have alfalfa feed at 40 NDF or less, harvest might start when fresh cut NDF is around 35. RFV and RFQ numbers might drop 10 to 25 points for these reasons. To have alfalfa feed at 160 RFV or RFQ, harvest might start when fresh cut samples read 180.

Change over Time. The margin allowed for harvest and storage loss can depend on the time needed to complete harvest. We generally expect the following as the crop grows and matures:

RFV declines 3-4 points per day. RFQ declines 4-5 points per day. NDF increases 0.5% per day.
NDFd decreases 0.5% per day

Estimating NDF of Alfalfa Grass Mix. Jerry and Debbie Cherney, Cornell University have developed a process for estimating NDF based on the height of the Alfalfa and the % Grass.

Weather is very often the driving factor for hay harvest. Growers often need to have equipment ready and look for a break in the weather that gives them a chance to get close to feed quality goals. An NDSU forage specialist suggests as alfalfa gets to be 22 to 24 inches tall, we ought to be taking a close look at the weather and maturity of the crop for dairy quality hay.

Daily National Weather Forecasts can be found by going to: http://www.weather.gov and enter the town closest to you. You can also look at a current radar screen here and other features.

Seasonal, 6 to 10 day, 8 to 14 days outlooks and other items can be found at
http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/OUTLOOKS_index.shtml. Internet users can probably find this pretty easily by putting “National Weather Service Outlooks Index” in the Google search box.

Please plan for a safe and productive first crop hay harvest!