

MFGA Green Gold Report – June 3, 2019 – EASTERN

Looking at the taller fields in the East report Hay Day is estimated to be June 8th. The shorter fields will be about 2 days later.

SITE	RFV NIR	RFV PEAQ	Height	CP
Ste Anne	252	252	14	26
Steinbach	226	216	18	28
Grunthal N	194	199	21	21
St Pierre E	192	193	22	21
St Pierre S	223	229	16	24
New Bothwell	197	204	20	23
Menisino	248	250	13	30
Stony Mountain	209	229	16	27
EASTERN AVERAGE	218	222	18	25

Since Thursday most alfalfa fields have added 2 inches of new growth. The slowdown may in part be due to the cooler conditions over the weekend and dry conditions. The crop has advanced to the early bud stage in most fields.

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What I am seeing

The alfalfa grew about ½ inch /day since last clipping, but for the most part has moved into the early bud stage. RFV continue to decline and we are now at a RFV of 213. It is declining at a rate of 5 pts/day and at this rate we should reach Hay Day on June 8th.

The goal of Hay Day is not to try to name the day that you should harvest. Rather the goal is to encourage growers who are busy with management of other crops to be more strategic with hay crop harvest as it relates to their needs.

We look at a RFV after harvest of 150; therefore we target 170 with the assumption that 15-20 pts will be lost due to drying and harvest.



Cutting Height in Forages

Whether you're taking the crop as haylage or dry hay, it's important to pay attention to forage cutting height. One goal is to maximize yield; however, cutting a crop too low can lead to several negative issues. The introduction of the disk-type mowers (discbines) allows for cutting very close to the ground (scalped). This differs considerably from the older sickle bar mowers (haybines), whose technology required that some level of stubble height remain. Stand longevity can be compromised when the crop is cut too low. As a general rule, alfalfa can be cut closer to the ground than our grass crops. We need to think about where energy reserves are stored in the crop. For alfalfa, carbohydrates are stored below the ground in the taproot. Grasses store their energy above ground in the stem base or tillers. Frequent mowing at a close height will continue to deplete these energy reserves, resulting in stand longevity issues.

The second consequence for mowing too close to the ground is increased ash content of the forage. All forage has a natural ash content of approximately 6%. However, mowing too closely with disk mowers can add soil to the crop, and increase the ash content by as much as 10-12% (18% ash content in total analysis).

So, the million-dollar question is how low can you go? If you have grasses involved, you must keep cutting height higher than a pure stand of legume, if you want to keep the grass in the stand. Keep in mind these are minimum recommendations; it's OK to mow higher than the numbers below.

Here are Minimum cutting height recommendations:

Alfalfa -2" minimum. Some literature shows a cutting height of 1" will not reduce stand longevity but remember the increased ash content issue. Also, keep in mind that frequent cutting at early maturity will continue to deplete carbohydrate reserves. One cutting of alfalfa should be allowed to reach the bloom stage each year.

Cool Season Grasses (Orchardgrass, Timothy) 4" during the establishment year, 3" minimum during production years. This is where we see most of our stand longevity issues. Frequent cutting of cool season grasses at a low height will continue to deplete energy reserves.

Mixed stands Alfalfa with some grass: 2.5" minimum. Grass with some alfalfa: 3" minimum (if you want to keep the grass stand!)