

IREDELL COUNTY CENTER

Livestock News: May 2020

Make Hay While the Sun Shines!

Hay is a vital portion of most beef cattle production systems in our area. Producers can choose to produce their own hay or purchase it from a hay producer. It is important for livestock producers to understand the processes of growing, harvesting, and storing hay if they are producing or purchasing hay. These processes influence the nutritive value of the hay which can alter livestock performance. By understanding the changes that can take place during hay production, you can adjust your nutrition program to maintain livestock performance.

Prior to the hay season and before each harvest all hay equipment should be thoroughly examined and serviced. All equipment should be greased, gear oil levels should be checked and filled, wheel bearings should be serviced, and tires should be checked and inflated. Mower blades need to be sharpened or replaced prior to the start of haying season. Failure to ensure that your haying equipment is in working order can delay harvest. Those rain showers delay you enough already, don't let improper equipment bog you down too!

Harvest Timing. The timing of your hay harvest should optimize both quality and quantity of your hay. Factors such as weather, equipment failures, off-farm employment, and other obligations can lead to delaying the harvest of your hay. Forage quality typically decreases with the increasing maturity. As forages mature, the leaf-to-stem ratio decrease. Higher proportions of stem results in higher concentrations of fiber and lower concentrations of crude protein and digestible dry matter. The management of forage crops is not just limited to producing a single high-quality crop. Most forages that are utilized for hay need time for adequate regrowth to maintain the stand. Cool season grasses such as tall fescue and orchardgrass should be harvested at the boot or early heading stages of growth for the first cutting and then at 45-60 day intervals thereafter. These harvest times should provide the best compromise between nutritive value and yield.

Cutting Height. The height at which forages can be cut is dictated by where they store their growth reserves. For example, alfalfa stores its growth reserves underground and can be mowed very close to the ground. Bermudagrass and white clover both store their growth reserves in stolons or "runners" that lay on the soil surface and are unaffected by cutting height. However, cool-season grasses (tall fescue and orchardgrass) need a stubble height of 2 to 3 inches as they store their growth reserves in the base of the stem. When these forages are mowed too close to the ground, the stand may be weakened. Most summer annual forages require a higher (6-8 inches) mowing height for adequate regrowth.

Hay Storage. Ideally, we would all have plenty of barn space for the abundance of hay that we produce every year but that is often not the case. Storage of hay at the edge of the hay field on the ground leads to greater deterioration of the hay. Approximately 50% of the storage losses can be attributed to the soil/hay contact when hay is stored outside and on the ground. Dry hay acts like a wick drawing moisture out of the soil and into the hay bale. Additionally, air movement is restricted around the bottom of the bales. This can be affected by the shape and density of the bale and the storage site. Improper storage can lead to moist conditions within the bottom of the bale which will promote microbial activity. Numerous methods have been used to elevate hay stored in the open. These include telephone poles, pallets, railroad ties, and pipe to lift the hay off the ground. These bases should allow for some air movement under the bales and also prevent the hay from sitting in standing water. The storage site for hay stored outside should be in a sunny, breezy, well-drained area. This location should be near the top of a slope if possible and have southern exposure. Rows should be oriented so they run up and down the slope, as rows running across the slope will trap water runoff. Bales should be butted up against each other within the rows while adjacent rows should not touch, with a gap of at least three feet.



Safety Reminder



While we are all ready to get started mowing, raking, and baling, it is important to remember to be safe! Most accidents can be avoided by following a few simple rules:

- If you have new equipment operators, make sure they are adequately trained on the piece of equipment that will be used. Even older equipment has safety guidelines that can be found online with a quick search.
- Roll Over Protection (ROPS) can save your life. Always wear a seatbelt if the tractor is equipped with ROPS. Older model tractors can be retrofitted with ROPS.
- Never start an engine in a shed or closed space. All internal combustion engines (diesel or gasoline) generate carbon monoxide.
- Keep your hitches low and always on the draw bar. This prevents the tractor from flipping over backwards.
- Know your terrain and limitations. Holes and washed areas can occur in fields where there haven't been in previous years. Scout your field for potential hazards.
- Never get off a moving tractor or leave the engine running. Shut the tractor off, set the parking brake, then dismount.
- Never refuel while the engine is running or hot. Always shut the tractor down when adding fluids, fuels, or performing maintenance.
- Always keep PTO properly shielded. PTO accidents can cause serious injury or death. Our human reflexes cannot compete with the speed and power of an engaged PTO shaft.
- Keep children away! Don't allow children to ride with you on the tractor. No exceptions! (unless it is an enclosed cab with a child seat)
- Take your time. Remember, tractors are designed for easy maneuverability at low speeds, not high speeds.



Pasture Weed Spotlight: Briars and Multiflora Rose

These stubborn, woody stemmed weeds can be found on fence lines, old hedgerows, or in the middle of the pasture. Briars and Multiflora Rose thrive in fields that have been abandoned or have seen very little weed maintenance over the years. They require herbicides specifically designed to target brush or woody species. Look for herbicides that contain Triclopyr. Apply herbicide early in the growing season when the plant is still somewhat tender and actively growing. You may want to bush hog or mow them off first--don't do it! You want as much leaf surface area as possible to increase herbicide absorption!

NCDA Now Accepting Routine Soil Samples

Good News! NCDA is once again accepting routine soil samples. Sample boxes are available in the lobby at the Iredell County Cooperative Extension Office. You will need to plan to mail in your



samples until further notice.

[Learn more »](#)

Helpful Links

[See Past Newsletters »](#)

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Accommodation requests related to a disability should be made to Iredell County Cooperative Extension at (704) 873 - 0507