Timing is Everything When Harvesting Alfalfa Haylage & Baled Alfalfa

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Control What You Can - Manage Through What You Cannot

In alfalfa production, timing is everything. Timing for the proper maturity to mow and timing the moisture for harvesting can make a difference of dairy quality or grinder quality. Some careful thought and planning can help reduce risks and increase the odds to get more of your alfalfa into dairy quality.

Knowing that Mother Nature can trump our best efforts, having a plan in place can reduce risks of a delayed harvest and increase the chance of more alfalfa in the high quality range hoped for.

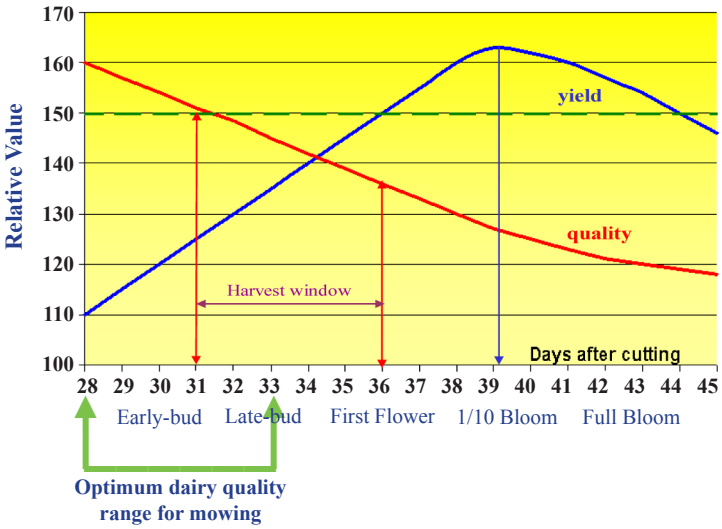
Evaluate current forage quality and indentify the challenges. Develop a plan to control the things you can control and better manage around some of the things you cannot.

1. Monitor crop MATURITY. Using a PEAQ stick (Predictive Equation for Alfalfa Quality), determine your forage quality need.Then, use the PEAQ stick based on plant height to determine forage quality.

Here are the target heights (late-bud stage) as predicted from the PEAQ stick:

- RFQ of 180 = 24" of growth
- RFQ of 170 = 26" of growth
- RFQ of 160 = 29" of growth
- RFQ of 150 = 32" of growth

Figure 1. ***Changes in forage quality with advancing maturity.***



For larger acreages or challenges of labor or equipment – the Pre-Bud Stage may be the time to start your cutting

2. Monitor MOISTURE prior to ensiling or baling alfalfa.

- Determine moisture levels to limit variability and know what moisture levels you need for quality.
- Tip the first 1/4 of windrows to tighten up moisture levels for ensiling haylage to 50-60% moisture rather than 50-70%.
- Baling at higher moistures (20-25%) saves the leaves for quality and yield if using a high quality preservative.