

On Dragging Before Cutting Alfalfa

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Recommendation NOT to drag down new grass/alfalfa seedings before the first cutting.

Some of our customers will drag the field of grass/alfalfa mix prior to cutting. A heavy rail or pipe is used to drag across the field and this pulls the alfalfa down, flattening it out in one direction. Then the grass/alfalfa mix is usually cut against the grain (opposite the direction that it is dragged down). This is done to prevent uneven lodging of the alfalfa and to give an even cut with a sickle bar mower.

If this is done on a new grass/alfalfa mix seeding for first cutting, we often see a lot of damage to the grass - thinning of the new grass stand due to damage, resulting in reduced re-growth. Sometimes the stand is left for a week like this or even two weeks. For the first cutting the alfalfa usually jumps ahead of the new grass. The new grass, growing below the alfalfa, will not be exposed to sunlight and can stay very moist and begin to die off because of reduced light and air movement; this dead grass may begin to rot underneath and will have a rotten smell to it. The higher humidity can cause diseases that kill the grass plants. This has been more pronounced with new seedings when done for the first cutting where the grass is behind and underneath the taller alfalfa. The dragging down of the alfalfa decreases light and air movement to the young grass underneath. Older established seedings of grass/alfalfa mix are not affected when the grass gets established and grows taller. But dragging before the first cutting of a new grass/alfalfa mix seeding when the grass is behind and lower than the alfalfa can have a major negative impact on the grass component portion of the new seeding.

My recommendation is to NOT drag the grass/alfalfa for the first cutting of a new seeding. Let a new seeding get established better, developing a stronger root system and it can be dragged for later cuttings.