ADVANCED AG SYSTEMS'S

Crop Soil News

http://www.advancedagsys.com/

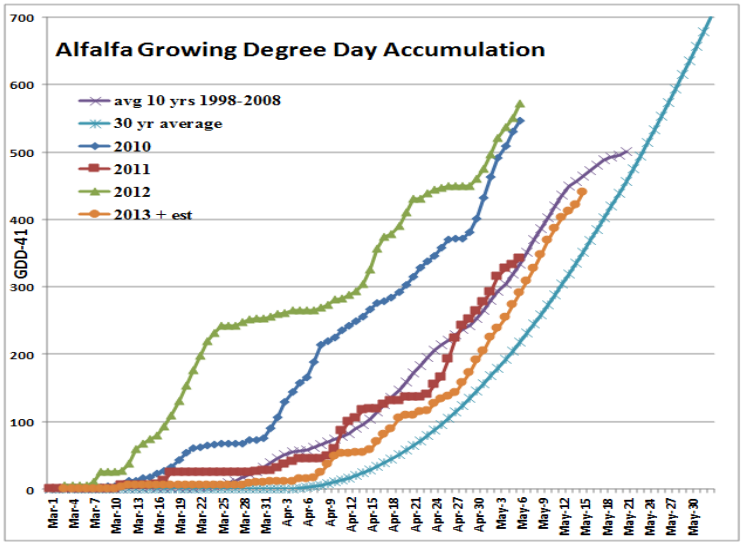
May 2013

"It is the crops that feed the cows that make the milk which creates the money."

Advanced Ag Systems
Research, Education, Consulting

The Great Leap Back to Normal

Each year we track where the crops are to give the farmers some idea if they should panic and stop planting corn to do haylage, or to keep planting. This year is no exception other than we, with our short term memory, are comparing it to the record early season of 2012. Yes, it is snowing in the mid-west. We had a major snow on Mother's day in the 1980's. The bottom line is that the weather has moved back to a near normal condition, something we are not used to having.

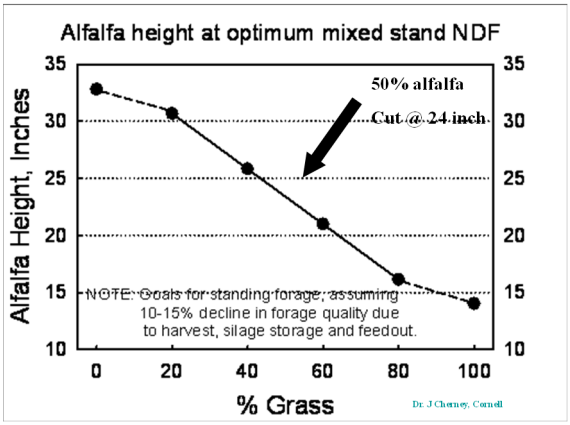


Tracking the years heat accumulation, we find that the season is made early or not, in late March and April. Once we get to the first part of May, it seems to settle into a somewhat regular growing degree day accumulation. As you can see in the graph, this March and April were just the opposite of 2012 in that they had zilch for growing degree day accumulations. **This year, May 1 we had hit the same GDD accumulations as we had on MARCH 22 of 2012!** This year is much closer to the 30 year average (note: 2013 GDD accumulation are base on recorded data to May 1, and predicted weather from May 2—May 15). Much of the heat has only arrived in the last week in our neighborhood. As most readers are not in the Hudson Valley, nor the state or even the US, how do you adjust for the weather in your particular farm?

This decision is critical as farms have found that high forage diets in the Northeast can significantly increase herd health, production, and profitability. You need enough forage – a significant problem on a large number of farms after the droughts of 2012. Just as critical, you need quality forage. Having piles of "chainsaw forage" is not going to help the production or profitability. A minimum of 60% NDFd is needed to support a high forage diet. YOU decide what quality forage you can feed by **WHEN** you **START** and **FINISH** your haylage harvest. A help is that there is a very big difference as you go from southern, low, warm elevations, to the more northern, higher elevation sites.

The above growing degree day calculations is to give you a general idea of how the season is progressing. **YOUR INDIVIDUAL FIELDS SHOULD DETERMINE WHEN**

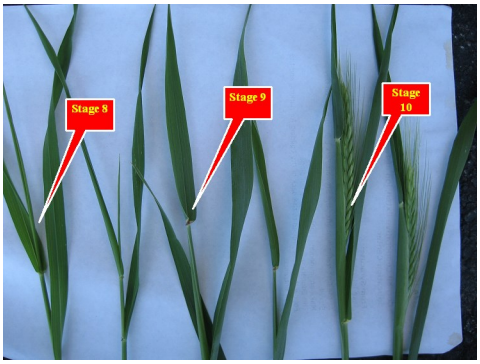
YOU SHOULD START HARVEST, using ***YOUR alfalfa as a phenological predictor***. This is a fancy way of saying that the height of alfalfa can predict when it and grass fields, in your local climate and condition, should be cut. With the high forage diets, Dr. Cherney at Cornell recommends that optimum milk production from grass is at 50 NDF. This starts to occur when alfalfa in the same or nearby field is 15 inches tall. Measuring **nearby alfalfa** at **15 inches** (38.1 cm) means that the grass field is at peak quality for cutting (in the dry areas the grass is short but will make up yield in 2nd cut). In mixed stands (50% alfalfa), when alfalfa is 24 inches tall (61 cm) then you should start cutting the 50% alfalfa stands. When pure alfalfa stands reach 30 inches (76 cm) , the harvest window is open. Most farms will not stop harvest to wait for the crop to catch up. **YOU ARE BETTER TO CUT TO EARLY THAN TO LATE.** This is especially critical with the grasses. What you lose in yield in first cut you make up for in 2nd cut. Fields that are in a low, warm, sheltered location, **are ready earlier** than the rest of the farm. A well drained soil will have more mature forage than poor drained soil. A north facing slope will be further behind a south or south east facing slope. For some farms, their south facing well drained clear alfalfa may be ready before a mostly grass field on a wet north facing slope.



We Now Have a System That Allows You to Tailor Harvest for YOUR Farm, YOUR Fields

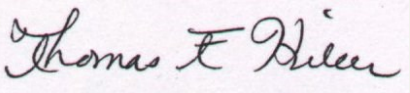
Dr Cherney has developed an even better system. **http://www.forages.org/joomla/index.php/tools** is where you download **GMT-2 Alfalfa-Grass NDF Estimation** and directly enter data to the program. It will give you an estimate of **how many days until that field reaches peak quality**. You just go from field to field, enter the data and get the potential harvest date. If the weather is predicting rain for that date, harvest earlier. A healthy dollop of **common sense is needed with any biological system**. Dr. Cherney's is one system that you can use to your advantage.

Winter Forage Harvest



With many new growers of winter forage (triticale), harvest timing is critical. Stage 9 where the flag leaf has just emerged, is higher milk/ton (4200) feed value yet still gives yields of 8—12 tons of silage/acre. If you miss and get early boot (stage 10), it is still 3600 milk/ton which is the same as corn silage and 20-30% higher yield, and can be fed to the lower producers. To get this heavy crop dry for silage you will need to wide swath **and** use a tedder. A new option is to make a wetter, high sugar, same day silage, and ferment with a **good straight homolactic bacteria** type product to bring the pH down fast and actually limit some of the excessive wild acetic that is made. This is not the L. buchneri types for these wet crops. L. buchneri is for drier forage. The whole process can be read at **http://advancedagsys.com/october-2012-wet-forage-5/** . The only caution is that if we get a week of cloudy rainy weather and you mow on the first sunny day, the crop will probably NOT be high in sugar for rapid fermentation; I don't know what will happen then. On the good news side, there is 60% less available water under a winter grain and so in the high rainfall areas, this may be the driest fields.

Sincerely,



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