



2011 BALAGE NEWSLETTER FROM MYERS FARM
October 24, 2011

“Be Careful What You Wish For!”

There is an old saying “Be careful what you wish for.” 2010 got off to a magnificent start with an early spring, much warmer than normal temperatures, and adequate moisture. It would certainly be great if every year would start out like that. However that was not to be the case this year.

In 2011 spring never wanted to come. It was cold and wet. Ideally I have alfalfa planted by April 1st, corn planted by May 1st, and soybeans planted by May 7th. This year it wasn't fit to think about having a tractor in the fields before the end of April. I never remember a year where things got started so late. We had a lot of very cool, cloudy weather. The alfalfa grew very slowly. Because of pounding rains once the new alfalfa seedings came up, they needed to be replanted in many areas. I think every farmer was hoping, praying, and wishing for some dry weather. But even when considering the challenges we had here with the weather, our problems were minimal compared to what happened with so much farmland being flooded in the mid-west with all of the river flooding, or in Texas and Oklahoma with all of the extreme heat and drought.

With as much moisture as we had in the spring, I figured that even if we had just 2/3 of normal rainfall this summer, we would not have to worry about any drought stress. Our hopes, wishes, and prayers were heard, and the excess rains stopped in early June. Yea!!!!!! But never did I imagine that we were starting a severe, two month drought. By the end of June we were hoping, praying, and wishing for significant rains to come. Rains came again in early August. It helped the alfalfa greatly and the soybeans significantly. The corn on the ridges was past the point of any return. As we got into the later part of August, and through September and October, the abundant rains were back. That had us once again hoping, praying, and wishing for dry weather. I don't remember any previous year where we could not get into the fields with us having a super wet spring, and then a major drought, followed by saturated ground conditions again in the fall.

First Cutting:

The established alfalfa was sprayed with Velpar just as it broke dormancy. The weed control was excellent. With the cloudy days and below normal temperatures the first cutting matured slowly. It was also barely fit to be in the fields when we harvested the first cutting. Harvest was completed on May 31st. It was in full bud stage. I didn't see more than 1 bloom every 5 acres. My experience is that generally alfalfa cut in this stage would have been about 20% to 22% protein and have a relative feed value of 150 to 160. I was shocked when the test came back with a relative feed value of 129 and 18.5% crude protein. In talking with other growers and customers, it appears that the really cool, cloudy, wet conditions contributed to the first cutting forage tests being lower than one would have anticipated that they would be.

<http://www.myersfarm.com/2011ForageTestFirstCutting.pdf>

Second Cutting:

Following the first cutting harvest, the rains pretty much stopped, and the temperatures were about normal. This year I applied Prowl H₂O as soon as the first cutting was off to control annual grasses and broadleaf weeds. Overall it did a good job. I needed to do a little cleanup spraying for annual grasses with Poast once the second cutting was harvested. We finished the second cutting on June 27th. The yield on the ridges was reduced, but the overall yield was still relatively good. The forage test was much better than the first cutting, The crude protein was 21.6% and the relative feed value was 143. Please click here to view the second cutting forage test:

<http://www.myersfarm.com/2011ForageTestSecondCutting.pdf>

Third Cutting:

As we moved on through July, we had a major drought. The corn, soybeans, and alfalfa were all suffering from severe drought stress. All of the alfalfa was sprayed for leafhoppers. The third cutting and first cutting of the new seedings yield was terrible, with just 13 bales off 54 acres. The harvest was completed on July 21st. The temperatures in July were normal to above normal. The 13 bales were not accessible when the tests of the second, second cutting new seedings, and fourth cuttings were tested so I do not have any test results to post here.

Fourth Cutting and Second Cutting of the New Seedings:

During late July and through August, we started getting significant rain. The second cutting of the new seedings and the 4th cutting of the established stands had sufficient rainfall to produce a good crop. Harvest of the 4th cutting was completed on August 23rd. Harvest of the second cutting new seedings was completed on August 30th. The fourth cutting crude protein was 23.3% and the relative feed value was 177. The second cutting new seedings crude protein was 23.9% and the relative feed value was 160. Please click the links below to view the complete fourth cutting and second cutting new seeding forage tests:

<http://www.myersfarm.com/2011ForageTestFourthCutting.pdf>

<http://www.myersfarm.com/2011ForageTestSecondCuttingNewSeeding.pdf>

Fifth Cutting:

Following the harvest of the fourth cutting, the weather stayed moderately warm and the rainfall continued. The established stands were harvested on October 10th with a respectable yield. The growth on two of the three new seedings is not sufficient to make another cutting on them. Depending on when we have a killing frost and the weather, we may harvest one field of the new seedings yet. It hasn't been long enough since harvest to have the forage testing done on the 5th cutting.

Summary:

Many years weather can make farming a challenge, especially with respect to harvesting high quality alfalfa. Attention to detail with respect to fertilization, weed and insect control, and harvesting is essential. I was disappointed that the first cutting didn't test higher than it did, but it is still very respectable feed. Even if from a management standpoint a farmer does everything timely and properly, mother nature still gets to have her say. The most important thing is that we count our blessings for what we do have and to be thankful for it.