



2012 BALAGE NEWSLETTER FROM MYERS FARM

Updated December 19, 2012

“Mother Nature Calling!”

“Hello, this is Mother Nature. It is time for all of you alfalfa plants to rise and shine. Spring is here. Why do you all look so sleepy? Come on now, up and at em!!!!” And the alfalfa plants listened to Mother Nature. By the end of March the alfalfa was about 8 inches high. Normally I can just see a little greening of the fields by then. So naturally there was great anticipation of an excellent early first cutting. But then Mother Nature came back to talk with the alfalfa plants again. She said to the alfalfa plants, “Now I understand why you were so sleepy when I woke you up. I made a mistake!!!! When I turned the calendar from February to March, the pages stuck together and I went straight to April. I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. I'll try to be more careful next year!!!!!!”

As April progressed we had 3 mornings of 25 degrees, and one morning when there was about an inch of snow, sleet and ice on the alfalfa. Our beautiful, early spring, had vanished.

New for 2012 – Triticale/Alfalfa and BMR Sorghum-Sudangrass/Alfalfa Balage:

Our main farm enterprise is producing high quality alfalfa balage. Corn and soybeans have been rotational crops grown primarily to rotate out of alfalfa and then the fields are returned to alfalfa production after one year of each. This year, instead of planting corn, we interseeded triticale in the alfalfa where the corn would have been planted in the fall of 2011, and did a spring harvest of alfalfa-triticale balage. We then planted BMR sorghum-sudangrass in the fields. It was suggested that we not kill the alfalfa since the sorghum-sudangrass would give significant competition to the alfalfa. In reality, the alfalfa hung in there quite well. We timed our harvests for quality, and not for maximum yield. Below are the forage tests for both first cutting and the second cutting of the alfalfa/sorghum-sudangrass mixture.

[Forage Test 1 - First Cutting - BMR Sorghum-Sudangrass/Alfalfa - 2012](#)

[Forage Test 2 – Second Cutting – BMR Sorghum-Sudangrass/Alfalfa – 2012](#)

First Cutting Alfalfa:

The established alfalfa was sprayed with Velpar just after it broke dormancy about the 12th of March. By the end of March, as stated above, it was about 8 inches high, and was looking great. April kept switching between above normal warmth and below normal cold. The cold weather set it back significantly. The yield overall was average, but not outstanding by any means. The harvest was early, and was completed by May 19th. The quality was extremely good to excellent. Below are the forage tests:

[Forage Test 1 - First Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

[Forage Test 2 - First Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

[Forage Test 3 - First Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

Second Cutting Alfalfa:

We had adequate soil moisture for the second cutting, so the general assumption would have been it would have been a very good harvest. It was basically slightly below average yield. The only conclusion I could reach was that there was practically no sunshine between the first and second cutting harvests. Prowl was applied to control annual broad leaf weeds and grasses as soon as the first cutting harvest was completed. Overall it did a good job. We finished the second cutting on June 16th which is early for our area. The crude protein ranged from 21.7 to 21.8%, and the relative feed value was 180 to 189. Please click here to view the second cutting forage tests:

[Forage Test 1 - Second Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

[Forage Test 2 - Second Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

Third Cutting Alfalfa:

During the later part of June and into the later part of July, we had a significant dry period. It was necessary to spray for leafhoppers. Weed control was excellent. The overall yield was about half of normal. Harvest was completed by July 13th, which once again, was early for our area. The forage quality was excellent.

[Forage Test 1 - Third Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

[Forage Test 2 - Third Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

Fourth Cutting Alfalfa:

After the third cutting was completed, we once again had adequate rains to produce a good 4th cutting. Leafhopper pressure was still high, so the 4th cutting was also sprayed for leafhoppers. Generally we need to only spray one cutting for leafhoppers. Harvest was completed by August 10th. The forage tests ranged from 20.9 to 23% protein. The Relative Feed Value was 158 to 168.

[Forage Test 1 - Fourth Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

[Forage Test 2 - Fourth Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

Fifth Cutting Alfalfa:

In a normal year, 4th cutting is completed between August 20th to 25th. My rule of thumb is that if the 4th cutting is done by that time, we will have an 80% chance of having a respectable 5th cutting. If the 4th cutting is harvested between the 25th of August to the 1st of September, the chance of a respectable 5th cutting drops to about 50%. If the 4th cutting is not harvested until after September 1st, then the chance of a 5th cutting is almost zero. We've never had a 4th cutting harvest as early as it was this year. Our rainfall remained good during August, and a good 5th cutting was harvested by September 14th. The forage tests were excellent. Two samples were taken.

[Forage Test 1 - Fifth Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

[Forage Test 2 - Fifth Cutting Alfalfa - 2012](#)

Summary:

Each year "Mother Nature" gives each of us new challenges with our farming operations, especially with respect to producing high quality forage. Attention to detail with respect to fertilization, weed and insect control, and harvesting is essential. The most important thing is that we do the best with the opportunities that mother nature gives us, and that the end of the season we have an appreciation for what we do have, and not what could have been.