

Forage Management

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Spring forage harvest planning checklist

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Safety

- Prepare crew and equipment for a safe field season

Prepare storage area

- Flexible storage options to sort forages by quality and intended animal group
- Size storage to planned feed-out rate
- Clean and safe storage infrastructure

Field inventory and harvest mapping

- How many tons of lactating quality feed do you need? Get that first!
 - Every field can be lactating quality feed if harvested at the correct time
 - Window for optimum hay crop quality is narrower than for corn planting
- Monitor fields for harvest timing starting in early May
 - CCE and support industry weekly height monitoring programs
- Target harvest order
 - Winter Cereals > Perennial Grass > Mixed Grass/Legume > Legumes
- Spring delays - skip fields already past their optimum, return later for non-lactating quality feed.

Harvest management

- Minimize time between cutting and ensiling of crops
 - Wide swath - >80% of cutter bar width
 - Avoid excessive windrow size - balance yield with quality potential
- Maintain a three to four inch cutting height (four inches for grasses)
 - Reduce contamination (Ash)
 - Keep windrows up off the ground to facilitate drying
 - Encourages healthier and vigorous regrowth of perennials
- Avoid chopping at wrong dry matter - matching mowing to chopping speeds
 - Rake/merge, chop before leaf material is too dry to avoid excess losses

Ensiling for efficient fermentation and minimal shrink

- Harvest at target dry matter for storage type
 - Haylage: ~35-38% DM
 - Baleage: ~40-55% DM
- Achieve target densities in horizontal silos
 - Packing weight to match delivery rate
 - minimum of 800 lbs. packing weight per ton delivered per hour
 - Pack uniformly in thin layers (ideal: four-inch layers)
 - Build piles to pack from any angle, 360 degrees around pile
 - Minimize silage piled higher than bunk walls - compromises density and safety
- Cover piles immediately
 - Use research proven inoculants and oxygen barrier plastic