



OKLAHOMA FORAGES NEWSLETTER



Volume 2 No. 5

April 2007 (No.5)

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BOOKMARKS

[Oklahoma Forages](http://forage.okstate.edu/)
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[OKLAHOMA FORAGE NEWSLETTER](#)

[Oklahoma Alfalfa](http://alfalfa.okstate.edu/)
<http://alfalfa.okstate.edu/>

[Oklahoma Alfalfa Variety Test Results](#)

We welcome contributions and suggestions. Comments about and contributions to the Oklahoma Forages Newsletter and/or our web sites are welcome and should be submitted to john.caddel@okstate.edu or daren.redfearn@okstate.edu

Everyone interested in forages is welcome to receive and contribute to the Oklahoma Forages Newsletter.

Cold Weather and Alfalfa

We have had many questions about what to do with alfalfa stands since April 7 and 8 when the temperatures dip to freezing or below in much of the state. Opinions ran from “harvest the hay as soon as possible” to “do nothing” and wait to see what kind of weather follows.

Why should opinions range so widely?

If you examine the situation, you may see clearly why. We have not had a spring like this one in memory.

- Temperatures did not drop uniformly across the state; some locations went down to about 20F while others did not drop below 35F. In addition many alfalfa fields are in low lying areas that typically get colder than hill sides and well-ventilated areas.
- Alfalfa was ready or nearly ready to harvest in many central and southern parts of the state while fields a few miles away may have been only four to six inches tall.
- Old stands were still suffering from extremely dry weather with only a slight reprieve in October or November of last year but overall subsoil moisture was still lacking. More ice coating alfalfa fields than normal.
- Many of the new stands planted last fall were marginal, at best, while others were in good shape. And what about the ice coatings during the winter?
- Most alfalfa stands went into the winter with little stubble. With the high price for hay, there was a strong temptation to harvest every last stem, and many fields did not have much growth after mid summer.
- Few alfalfa insects through the winter.
- Temperatures had been warm in March - stimulating growth more than usual. Generally, it looked like we should be harvesting hay two to three weeks earlier than usual.

If alfalfa is harvested early when the soil is wet, the regrowth will be hurt and the ruts will be with you for the life of the stand. Making hay would be slowed by cool moist conditions. **Conclusion - early harvest would not be advisable.**

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Cold Weather and Alfalfa (continued from page 1)

If the alfalfa stems were killed but not harvested, some potential hay would have been lost. **Conclusion - harvesting early would save a little hay.**

If the alfalfa was (is) two feet tall or more and healthy in April or early May, it should be harvested, regardless of a cold snap. Waiting for alfalfa to bloom at first harvest is rarely a good practice. The first flush of growth in many fields does not bloom. **Conclusion - harvest as soon as the soil holds up equipment and hope for drying weather.**

Most of the state falls into the category of the *freezing temperatures did not kill the stems and alfalfa plants would begin regrowing a few days after normal temperature return.* **Conclusion - doing nothing is best and be ready for first harvest about the normal time.**

In general, an alfalfa stand is too valuable to risk doing anything that will have a long-term negative effect. Apparently the situation was quite different in parts of southern Kansas where all alfalfa growth was frozen to the ground. Farther north into parts of the Midwest the drastic cold thinned many stands and completely destroyed others.

For additional information about harvesting and harvest management see [Alfalfa Harvest Management Discussions with Cost-Benefit Analysis-E-943.](#)

-- John Caddel
Forage Agronomist
Plant & Soil Sciences Department, OSU

CONTRIBUTIONS WANTED

Do you have a comment about some aspect of forage production that you would like to share?

Do you have a question about some aspect of forage production?

Have you read something that helped your forage production and want to share it with the readers of Oklahoma Forages Newsletter?

Send comments, questions, or articles you have seen and want to share to Daren Redfearn daren.redfearn@okstate.edu To remain anonymous, just let us know.

The **OKLAHOMA FORAGES NEWSLETTER** is published in electronic format on an as needed basis throughout the year. To receive a notice when a new version becomes available, send an email with "subscribe" as the subject line to john.caddel@okstate.edu





Forage Seminar and Pasture Tour Eastern Research Station

May 10, 2007

9:00 am - 2:00 pm

(Registration begins at 8:30 am)

Topics

Lessons on Managing Moisture
Barn Storage for Hay
Fertilizer Sources
Establishing Alfalfa in Grass Pastures
Establishing and Maintaining Cool Season Legumes
Costs of Water Development
Hands on GPS Guidance System Demonstration

Speakers

Roy Ball, Extension Agriculture Educator, Craig County
Bill Burton, Area Farm Management Specialist
John Caddel, Extension Forage Legume Specialist
Daren Redfearn, Extension Forage Specialist
Bob Woods, Area Extension Agronomy Specialist
Hailin Zhang, Extension Soil Fertility Specialist

Lunch and Refreshments Sponsored by

Farm Credit Services
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Newell Wood Products
H and H Equipment Center
DuPont

The station consists of 298 acres and is located 14 miles west of Muskogee at the intersection of Highways 16 and 72.

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