FORAGES FEED THE STATE

OKLAHOMA FORAGES NEWSLETTER

OSU OKLAHOMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

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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.

Update on Alfalfa Around the State

In the July issue of Oklahoma Forages Newsletter we discussed several of the down side things that happened to alfalfa and a few positive aspects of this years crop.

Negatives

- Late freeze caused the loss of much of the first harvest.
- Excessive rains stopped harvest and ruined hay in windrows.
- Spring black stem was severe and stay around for a long time.
- Potato leafhoppers came into the state early, moved farther west than usual and stayed longer than usual, leaving alfalfa plants stunted and discolored.

Positives

- The drought broke during the winter.
- In spite of several big snow storms the winter was relatively mild.
- Good growth early.
- Good price for good hay because depleted supplies during the drought.
- General lack of alfalfa weevils, aphids, and nematodes during the spring.

Current Conditions

Informal surveys of alfalfa fields and producers' emails and calls indicate alfalfa still has a lot of problems. Few fields look good. The combination of excess rain (extended wet soils, submerged fields, etc.), spring black stem, root rots, and potato leafhoppers have taken a serious toll on most fields.

Some stands are coming back a little better than expected, but most have thinned and/or have no alfalfa in the poorly drained areas. Some fields have so many broadleaf weeds and grass that it is hard to be sure if they were alfalfa fields last fall. Stands are yellow and dying from weeks of waterlogged soils and uncontrolled potato leafhoppers. Recent high temperatures and wind continue to stunt plant growth. Yields have generally been low yield and quality of most hay is not good enough to demand top prices. Alfalfa is a crop that does best in dry hot weather with water deep in the soil where the roots can reach it but not on the surface.

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

Frequently Asked Questions:

Question: If a field was planted last fall (2006) and drowned this spring, can I replant alfalfa this fall?

Short Answer: Yes, it is worth a try, especially when you don't have another field ready with adequate fertilizer and lime.

Longer Answer: Autotoxicity is a reason to not follow alfalfa with alfalfa without a rest of several years. Autotoxicity will probably not cause many problems this year because the toxin comes from the tops of plants and there may be few if any tops to concern you. Also, the toxin is water soluble and is dissipated with a few inches of water.

Lack of deep soil moisture is a big problem when alfalfa has been growing in a field for several "normal" years. Again this should not be a major concern for most farmers in Oklahoma.

Replacing soil nutrients used by an alfalfa stand can be overcome with a fertilization program based on good soil tests.

So, the recommendation to go ahead and plant alfalfa is not normal but may work under these conditions.

Question: Can I replant the areas of the field that drowned and leave the rest?

Answer: Yes, but be sure to make a good seedbed, which is not easy under these conditions. It is also important to make sure the low spots will drain in the future.

Question: How should I treat my field that looks so bad? Will it come back to good production or should I plow it up and start over?

Answer: Considering the cost of establishing a new field, I recommend pampering the fields that look bad but still have a good stand. Leave at least five weeks between cuttings; even though, quality will be mediocre or poor. Letting it grow for an extra week may make the difference in having a good field next year and not.

Be extra careful in scouting fields for insects and weeds. My recommendation this year is - when in doubt, control the insects and weeds; even though, you would normally wait to see if it is real problem. Alfalfa has been subjected to too many negatives this year to let another problem hurt the stand more.

Alfalfa Varieties for Oklahoma

"Alfalfa Varieties for Oklahoma, 2007" has been published on line as PT-2007-7. This publication summarizes the best varieties in our tests. In addition detailed yield results for alfalfa variety tests can be found at Oklahoma Alfalfa Variety Testing

Summary of Good Varieties

55H05 was developed and has been marketed by Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc. since its release in 2002. 55H05 has always been a high yielder in seven test.

Magnum V, released in 1995 by Dairyland Seeds, has been one of the highest yielding and well-tested varieties for this area. It has consistently produced high yields in diverse locations.

Good As Gold II was released in 1999 as a replacement for Good As Gold. It has performed well in our tests and is distributed by Johnston Seeds.

Garst 6420 was released in 1998, and is distributed in Oklahoma by Garst Seed dealers. It is another in a long line of good varieties marketed by this company.

OK 49 is a relatively old (1990) variety developed by the Oklahoma Ag. Experiment Station for Oklahoma that has maintained its high yield and persistence. It is marketed by Ross Seeds.

Magna 601, released in 1999, is distributed by Dairyland Seeds. It has performed well in all but one test where it was included, and for some unknown reason some other traditionally good varieties performed poorly in the same test.

Roundup Ready® Alfalfa Was Here

During the last several years Roundup Ready® alfalfa has been the subject of the most frequently asked questions. Roundup Ready® alfalfa was deregulated in June 2005 and was the first perennial forage GMO cleared for cultivation. This meant it could be produced without restrictions. We have been working with industry and other Universities to collect as much data as possible about RR alfalfa varieties and their management. Oklahoma Forages Newsletter issue #1, 2007 had a summary of some of our Roundup Ready® grazing alfalfa activities, and issue #3 had a summary of seeding rate studies with Roundup Ready® alfalfa.

During spring 2007 a judge ruled that the USDA had not submitted a "complete" environment impact statement regarding RR alfalfa and that no RR alfalfa could be planted after March 30, 2007 until the environment statement is completed, but alfalfa that was planted prior to that date could be used commercially. Now, there has been an administrative order issued by the USDA as a result of the court injunction on Roundup Ready® alfalfa setting out how RR alfalfa can be used. The ruling, "2007 Court Ruling On Roundup Ready® Alfalfa"is available on-line. In general, the ruling says that RR alfalfa planted before March 30, 2007 can be used in the production of forage but it must be labeled and maintained separate from non-RR alfalfa when it leaves the farm where it was produced. The ruling also details how harvest equipment must be cleaned when the equipment is moved from a RR alfalfa field to non-RR alfalfa fields. Everyone who bought Roundup Ready® alfalfa seed should receive a notice about the ruling.

Be sure to note that no claim that RR alfalfa has harmed anyone or anything, and no potential danger to anyone or anything has been claimed. APHIS lists 35 counties in Oklahoma where RR alfalfa was planted, indicating a great interest in this new technology. Other information about this ruling and some of the history of the court case can be found on the internet at USDA - APHIS - Biotechnology.

-- 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