



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
MARINETTE COUNTY

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If you will need any type of accommodation or assistance as you attend any Extension sponsored event, please contact the host county or Scott at the Marinette County office at least two days prior to the event. All requests will be confidential.

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May, 2019 Newsletter

This is an abbreviated newsletter, due to a variety of issues related to printing, etc... As we progress through planting and first crop seasons, keep safety in mind for yourself, your family, and your employees. First crop is always very important, but even more so this year for many of our area farms. Make sure your harvest window hits your quality needs by using PEAQ on your own fields or accessing the local data which I will be collecting.

If you want to volunteer one of your alfalfa fields for the scissors clip project, or want to conduct any type of nutrient management or agronomic management trial, contact me via one of the manners to the side.

Scott Reuss

Upcoming Events (contact Scott or Sarah for information on any included events for which you want more details)

Alfalfa First Crop data collection days will be Tuesdays May 7, 14, 21, 28 and June 4 - check for new data available by Tuesday evening (see pg. 2/3)

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| Thursday, May 2 | <u>Froggy Night Hike</u> at Hemlock Curve Nature Trail from 5:30 to 6:45 pm |
| Friday, May 3 | <u>Farm Management Update</u> - Kimberly Hall (see flier in last month's newsletter or online) |
| Saturday, May 4 | <u>Spring Wildflower Walk</u> at Harmony Arboretum from 9-11 am |
| Tuesday, May 7 | <u>Maximizing the Home Vegetable Garden</u> workshop at Harmony Arboretum from 6:30 to 8 pm |
| Wednesday, May 15 | <u>Astronomy Night</u> at Harmony, 8:15 - 9:30 pm |
| Saturday, May 18 | Master Gardener Volunteer <u>Plant Sale & Plant Pest Clinic</u> at Harmony, 9 am to Noon |
| Saturday, May 18 | NC WI Cattlemen's Association <u>Spring Preview Show</u> in Medford & Showmanship Clinics |
| Wednesday, May 22 | <u>Fruit Crop Pest Management</u> workshop at Harmony Arboretum, 6:30 to 8 pm |
| Saturday, June 1 | <u>Bird Hike</u> at Harmony, 6-8 am |
| Sunday, June 9 | <u>Oconto County Breakfast on the Farm</u> , pg. 4 |
| June 19-21 | <u>Sand Lake Conservation Camp</u> - contact Marinette Cty. Land & Water for details, grades 6-8. |
| Sunday, June 30 | <u>Marinette County Breakfast on the Farm</u> |
| Monday, July 8 | <u>Women Caring for the Land</u> workshop at Pape Family Pastures, 4-8 pm. |
| July 10, 12, 17, 19 in Coleman | <u>Youth Tractor & Machinery Safety Training</u> - \$35 Registration Fee - flier in June newsletter prob. |
| Friday, July 19 | <u>Beef Grazing Workshop</u> at Pape Family Pastures |

Alfalfa Decision Making: Keep, Rotate, Supplement?

As we come out of frozen soil conditions and enter plant growth days, many of us are going to need to make some decisions regarding alfalfa fields. Very initial indications are that we do not have widespread full-scale winter death of alfalfa as we did last year. However, there are definitely dead spots and probably some fields that are not worth the harvest costs to keep them. Every field, every year, should have a thought process applied to it so that the proper decisions are made regarding rotation. Here are a few of the basics to remember:

- Analyze stand density and consistency. Take stand counts in many different areas of the field and come up with a solid average. While doing that, pay attention to stand consistency, as that is another part of this decision-making process. A more precise yield potential equation is this:
Yield (tons/acre) = (Stems/ft² × 0.1) + 0.38

Stems/ sq. ft.	Action needed?
More than 55	Stem count NOT limiting yield.
40-55	Stem count MAY BE limiting yield.
Less than 40	Stem count DEFINITELY limiting yield

- Analyze your forage needs. How much forage do you need? Of what quality? When do you need it? The answers to these questions will help you decide the best actions to take from the following valid options. Of course, especially this year, dollars available for crop inputs will also play a big part in your decisions.

- **40-55 stem count fields.** The first question to ask yourself here is the consistency. If it is a consistent stand, your forage yield and quality will suffer less than if it is a spotty stand and there are likely no real good fill-in options that are worth the dollars and sense. If it is inconsistent, strongly consider filling in the dead spots (a common issue I expect to see this year), or supplementing really thin stand areas. The best options for species in such situations will vary according to how long you want to keep the stand and a little bit according to whether you usually make haylage or hay.

If 2019 will be the last year of this stand, then best option is probably Italian ryegrass, as it has the fastest growth, is cheaper, and can be harvested multiple times. If you want to keep the stand longer, then consider perennial ryegrass, orchardgrass, festulolium, or some other perennial grass options. Haylage harvest gives you some legume options, including crimson or red clovers for this year only, or red clovers for multi-year hopes.

- **Less than 40 stem counts.** You need to turn the field over or supplement the stand.

If you need forage right away, the standard answer is to take first crop and then plant corn silage. BUT, this is the most costly of all your options. Really, truly think about if you are not better served to buy some extra forage and get the silage planted at the proper time - a very good Michigan State University study showed that most years, farms are better off financially to just kill these types of stands and plant corn silage right away and the rest of the time, they are better off to keep the poor stands - it hardly every works best to do first crop and then plant silage.

Supplement the stand. As per above, how long do you want to keep the stand? If it was a brand new stand last fall, you can re-plant alfalfa in the thin spots, other than that, planting alfalfa seed is a waste of time and money, due to its autotoxicity factors. A slightly unusual option to consider on these really thin stands is to no-till forage oats right into the stand and then harvest as appropriate for the oats. This then gives you a field for summer manure opportunities, another small grains forage crop, cover crop experiments, or winter wheat if that is an option for your rotation.

There is all types of information available to assist you with decision-making about any forage crop situation on the Extension Team Forage website. The specific alfalfa page is below, but for any other topic, just take off the alfalfa/ ending and you can maneuver from the main page to any topic you want to peruse.

<https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/forage/alfalfa/>

If in doubt, feel free to call me and I can help you with stand assessments, thought processes, or with whatever else you want assistance- although you probably don't want me milking for you while you plant or harvest!!

Planning First-crop Forage Harvest Timing

A normally expected RFQ (Relative Forage Quality) drop per day would be about four or five points. Warm, sunny weather will accelerate maturation such that the RFQ will drop more quickly, as much as 8 or 9 pts/day. 2019 early alfalfa growth is just beginning, as I compile this newsletter. So, I'm being a bit liberal in my dates of quality monitoring, as I would rather have too many scheduled rather than miss our harvest window.

Some considerations for your planning & scheduling thought processes:

- #1. Harvesting causes at least a 10% quality loss. Thus, cutting at 200 leads to 180 in the bunker. You also need to account for daily drops in quality and begin early.
- #2. What quality do you really need and which fields can achieve different goals most efficiently? Grassy or weedy fields will have lower RFQ values than will pure alfalfa stands, usually by about 10-15%. If you only need dairy forage, start with grassy/weedy fields and then go to the pure alfalfa stands. If you need a mix of forages, you'll increase your efficiency by switching them around.
- #3. Red clover stands will hold their feed value longer. These fields can likely be harvested last and will probably still have RFQ values in the 150 range. The same applies for new low-lignin alfalfas.
- #4. Weigh the trade-offs for your operation. Every day you wait to cut, you lose quality, but gain quantity. Decide which is most important for your operation and plan your cutting schedule on those needs.
- #5. Be ready to go with any post-harvest treatments, such as fertilization or manure spreading. You really need to get any post-harvest driving on those stands done as fast as possible, so that you minimize the wheel damage, preferably getting everything done within four days of cutting. This is particularly important if you have lower fall dormancy alfalfa cultivars in your fields.

Where to get up-to-the-minute forage quality data:

Option #1. Conduct PEAQ (Predictive Estimated Alfalfa Quality) testing on your own fields. If you need the PEAQ table, it is available all over on the web, including at

<https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/forage/files/2014/01/PEAQTable.pdf> This works very well. My comparison of doing PEAQ and Scissors Clip for many years leads me to believe that PEAQ is actually more accurate than Scissors Clip, especially on less-mature forages.

Option #2. Contact one of the following for our local First Crop Quality Data, updated weekly:

Marinette & Oconto County Scissors Clip Hotline 1-877-884-4408 or 715-732-7510.

e-mail to sreuss@marinettecounty.com Or go online at <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/scissorsclip/> to get data from across the state as well as local data. You can look at how alfalfa quality is progressing further south, and simply click on our region to see our most recent data set.

Scott will be collecting PEAQ data every Tuesday starting May 7th, through June 4th. During the primary week(s) of harvest, I will likely add a Friday collection. Further, if the harvest window is later than normal this year, I would add at least one more sampling week. The use of PEAQ allows for a larger number of fields to be sampled, so there should be a field relatively close to your locale that you can use as an indicator.

By using PEAQ, I am able to collect data from a large number of fields, so I should have data within shouting distance of you, wherever you are located. If you're interested in having one of your fields on the rotation, let me know. The message each time will give the place and the average RFV for each individual site.

Use of Inoculant - UW-Extension does recommend use of a Lactobacillus inoculant on first cutting because bacteria levels are naturally low on alfalfa grown under cool weather conditions. The value of added inoculant to chopped forage is increased when cool or outright cold weather occurs in days leading up to harvest.

Use of inoculant has been shown to be most beneficial if the forage can be ensiled rapidly; forage left laying in the field for more than two days will likely not benefit from added inoculant. Also, benefit of inoculant use for baleage is doubtful due to inability to get good coverage as forage is being baled.





Our two counties' Breakfast on the Farm events are June 9 and June 30 this year. Here is the initial notice for the Oconto County event, being hosted this year by Peterson's Dairy LLC. There will be more info in next month's newsletter on their event, as well as the Marinette BOTF, hosted by Dan-Sue & Son Dairy Farm in the Town of Grover on Sunday, June 30.

Please consider assisting as you are able with either, or both, of these great events. They are probably the best way in which we can positively influence people's understanding of agriculture. If not able to volunteer, you can hopefully stop by for a great meal.

Sources of Crop Management Information

There are many different on-line sources of information available to you as a producer, most of them free, some of them commercialized, others not. Here are some Wisconsin and Wisconsin Extension specific resources that I recommend you consider accessing or joining:

- Coolbean List-serve that allows you to receive up-to-date information related to Midwest soybean and small grains production issues. Weekly, or more often, updates on information sources, growth conditions, etc... posted by Shawn Conley, UW-Madison/Extension Soy & Small Grains specialist. Send an e-mail to join-ext-coolbean_info@lists.wisc.edu and you will probably need to confirm your membership by clicking on a link that gets e-mailed to you.
- Wisconsin Crop Manager Very detailed information sent weekly during the cropping season regarding all types of crops grown in Wisconsin. Also links you to the WI Pest Management Bulletin, Vegetable Update, and Fruits Updates, so I am not listing those separately. This is an easy way to get crop pest alerts, find out about new pesticide registrations, and all sorts of other cropping news. Anyone may join the Wisconsin Crop Manager email list by sending a **blank email with no subject line** to join-wisconsincropmanager@lists.wisc.edu

Wisconsin NRCS Announces 2019 EQIP Signup Deadline

Farmers and forest landowners interested in the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) need to apply by May 17, 2019, for several special initiatives focusing on conservation efforts. Special sign-up opportunities are now open for Beginning Farmer, Farmstead, Soil Health, and four landscape-based initiatives. All offer technical and financial assistance through EQIP, which is the primary program available to farmers for farm and woodland conservation work, offering payments for over 110 basic conservation practices.

All eligible applications received by May 17, 2019, will be evaluated for funding in 2019. Farmers may contact their local USDA Service Center to get started on producer eligibility and planning. Farmers who are interested in practices that may require permits, such as manure storage or streambank restoration, are reminded to begin planning and seeking permits as soon as possible. Applicants with shovel-ready projects (designs completed, and permit applications submitted) will receive higher priority. For more information, visit www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov.