

Forage Tips for the Quarter

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1st Quarter

January

- If adequate supplies of corn stalks exist, supplement with good quality forage.
- In very cold weather, provide windbreak or shelter and feed extra energy.
- Keep snowmobiles out of alfalfa.
- Calculate costs and possible returns associated with this year's forage enterprise.
- In southern Indiana, frost seed legumes in pastures that contain less than 30 percent legumes.

February

- Frost seed legumes in pastures that are less than 30 percent legumes if not already done in January.
- If cows weren't removed from stalk fields earlier, remove them now to avoid soil compaction.
- Frost seed legumes into small-grain fields.
- Apply herbicides for control of winter-annual grass and broadleaf weeds in alfalfa.

March

- Finish renovation of pastures by mid-March.
- Scout alfalfa fields for heaving and winter injury; if severe damage is present, introduce another legume or grass, or make plans to rotate to another crop.
- Soil test areas for late-summer seedings and apply lime now if necessary.
- Apply pre-plant herbicides for legume seedings or consider the use of a companion crop such as spring oats.
- Apply two-thirds of the annual nitrogen fertilizer to grass pastures in late March; also apply needed phosphorus and potassium to all pastures.
- Seed new pastures or hay land to recommended forages when soil conditions permit.
- In grass tetany problem areas, be sure all cows get at least 1 ounce of magnesium oxide per head daily in mineral mix or protein supplement.

2nd Quarter

April

- When pasture has adequate growth, turn out livestock; pastures newly seeded with legumes should be grazed intensively to reduce competition from grasses.
- Feed supplemental energy, such as corn silage, hay, or corn, if animals are thin or if pasture quality is low.
- Begin scouting for the alfalfa weevil.
- Remove livestock from fall-seeded small grains prior to jointing.
- Seed warm-season perennial grasses no sooner than in late April.
- Apply spring fertilizer to pastures as recommended by soil tests, if not already applied in March.
- Be sure to provide poloxalene or use other bloat-reducing management practices when bloat-causing legumes are grazed.

May

- Graze grass pastures newly seeded with legumes to reduce competition.
- If more forage is available than can be fully utilized, limit pasture size and harvest excess forage as hay.
- Continue scouting for alfalfa weevil and begin scouting for potato leafhopper in late May.
- For top quality, harvest first cutting of established alfalfa in late bud, red clover in early bloom, and grasses at the boot stage (when seedhead is just about ready to emerge).
- Apply fertilizer (P205, K20, and possibly boron to alfalfa) according to soil test and yield goals immediately following harvest.
- Remove livestock from legume pastures for four weeks to allow reserves to rebuild.
- Finish seeding warm-season perennial grass pastures.
- Seed summer-annual grasses in late May.
- Move cattle from pastures newly seeded with legumes to allow the legumes to grow.
- Harvest winter-annual small grains for forage at the boot stage for top quality.
- Test each harvested forage crop for nutritive value. Remember to do this throughout the season.
- Treat grass fields for broadleaf weeds and newly sown legume fields for grassy and/or broadleaved weeds. Follow grazing and harvest restrictions.

June

- Clip mature forage that was not grazed. This will encourage new growth, reduce the incidence of eye irritation, and setback weed growth.
- Drag the pasture after clipping to spread manure piles, destroy internal parasite eggs, and reduce selective grazing.

- Harvest established alfalfa approximately 30 days following first harvest. For top quality, harvest when in late bud.
- Continue scouting for potato leafhopper.
- Harvest spring seeded legumes approximately 70 days following seeding.
- Inventory pastures for poisonous weeds.
- Remove livestock from cool-season grass pasture and place on warm-season perennial grass pasture if available.
- Control grazing--pasture forage yields are affected by excessive and untimely grazing.
- Harvest spring oats for forage at the boot stage for top quality.
- If pasture or hay fields have not been soil tested for several years, it would be advisable to test them now. Fields to be planted in August should also be tested if not previously done.

3rd Quarter

July

- Continue scouting for potato leafhopper.
- Control grazing and include supplemental forage during periods of low pasture production.
- Remove livestock from cool-season grass pastures and place on summer-annual grass pastures if available.
- Purchase forage seed to be sown in August. Make sure the forage is adapted to the site selected. Remember to purchase inoculant so legumes can fix their own nitrogen.
- Cut hay if ready for harvest.
- Till fields intended for an August seeding in northern Indiana. Incorporate recommended fertilizer.
- If you typically buy hay for winterfeeding, consider buying it out of the field from a local producer now. Prices are typically lower in mid-summer than during the winter.
- Cut brush and unwanted trees in pasture; treat stumps with herbicide.

August

- Till fields intended for an August seeding in southern Indiana by mid-month. Incorporate recommended fertilizer and herbicides.
- New pasture or hay field should be sown by early August in northern Indiana and by late August in southern Indiana. A firm seedbed is essential!
- If needed, adjust soil pH with the addition of limestone on pastures where legumes will be sown during the late winter.
- As during July, rotate pastures, scout for potato leafhopper, and harvest hay when ready for harvest.
- During periods of drought, implement precautionary measures to prevent nitrate toxicity.

- Consider sowing small grains for fall grazing if idle land exists.

September

- Final forage harvest during the growing season should be made by the first week, second week, and third week respectively for northern, central and southern Indiana.
- After hay harvest the forage should be fertilized to maintain stands and promote winterhardiness. Apply 15 lbs P205 and 60 lbs K20 annually for each ton of alfalfa hay harvested.
- Apply one-third of the annual nitrogen fertilizer on grass pastures; graze grass-legume pastures lightly for the remainder of the season or rest them so the reserves in the legume crown can be replenished.
- Supplement livestock grazing bloat-causing legume pastures with poloxalene, especially during periods of lush growth.
- Soil test fields intended for spring forage seeding and apply lime if needed as soon as possible.
- Harvest corn silage when the grain is physiologically mature (when black layer forms).
- Don't forget to scout new alfalfa fields for potato leafhopper. The insect can be especially harmful to young alfalfa seedlings

4th Quarter

October

- A final alfalfa harvest can be made in late October when growth has stopped and the temperature drops to 24°F or below.
- Reduce injury to the legume stand by removing livestock from the pasture during excessively wet conditions.
- Overgraze pastures that are to be renovated with legumes.
- Consider pasturing corn stover as a feed cost reduction strategy.
- In grass tetany problem areas, be sure all cows get at least 1 ounce of magnesium oxide per head daily in mineral mix or protein supplement.

November

- Restrict all traffic on legume hay fields.
- Check on seed availability and price for next spring's seeding.
- Select appropriate forage species and varieties for the following season.
- Continue to overgraze pastures that are to be renovated with legumes.
- On non-erosive and dry soils, disturb pastures with tillage to prepare the pasture for renovation.
- Broadcast fall-applied herbicides for the control of winter-annual weeds in legume fields.

December

- Begin feeding legume hay or protein supplement fortified with Vitamin A to livestock grazing cornstalks.
- Calculate costs and returns associated with the forage enterprise this year.
- Renew membership in Indiana Forage Council.