



LEWIS COUNTY AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES May 2018

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The Value of Cutting Hay Earlier

We all know that cutting hay earlier is almost always better. That is, as long as you can cut it without it getting rained on. The following is taken from a recent article by Dr. Jimmy Henning summarizing the value of earlier hay cutting. His justification comes from the UK College of Ag publication 'Quality Hay Production' (AGR-62) that shows the impact that stage of harvest has on fescue hay forage quality and animal gain (Table 1).

Tennessee research compared three fescue hays cut May 3, May 14 and May 25 (these dates would be slightly later in KY). The dates corresponded to late boot/early head, early bloom, and early milk stage/seed forming, respectively. These hays were then fed to 500 lb. holstein heifers. The heifers ate more of the early cut hay, 13 lb/day compared to 11.7 and 8.6 for later cut hay.



Early cut hay had the highest digestibility and crude protein. The drop in digestibility was small between May 2 and May 14, but much larger over the next 11 day period. Crude protein dropped about the same (about 3 percentage units) for each 11 day delay.

Gain per day ranged from 1.39 to 0.42 lb/day for the three hays. The earliest cut hay supported the best gains, as expected. The decline in average daily gain was about the same for each 11 day delay in cutting.

Maturity decreased average daily gain much more than forage digestibility. A delay of 22 days dropped digestibility by 17% (68 to 56%). Over this same period, daily gain dropped by 70% (1.39 to 0.42 lb/day). Small changes in quality made big differences in gain. Although the forage yield was lower in the early cut hay, there were 22 extra days of forage growth compared to the May 25 cutting. Enough growth to virtually guarantee a high quality second cutting or grazing before the heat of summer. Cutting hay early pays, especially for growing cattle. And small differences in maturity can make big differences in gain and your bottom line.

Table 1. Effect of stage of harvest of fescue hay on forage quality and animal gain.*

Stage of harvest, date of cutting	Dry matter intake lb/day	Percent digestibility	Percent protein	Feed efficiency, lb hay fed per lb of gain	Yield, lb per acre	Gain, lb per day
Late boot to head, May 3	13.0	68	13.8	10.1	1334	1.39
Early bloom stage, May 14	11.7	66	10.2	13.5	1838	0.97
Early milk stage – seed forming, May 25	8.6	56	7.6	22.5	2823	0.42

*Holstein heifers were used, average weight – 500 lb



A Great Spring for Aphids

This long spring is ideal for aphids. Colonies of the small sap-feeders (Figure 1) can be found on many landscape plants now. Impacts of aphids vary widely. Some species manage to remove sap without any obvious effect on plants. However, a plant's reaction to injected saliva may result in severe distortion of new tissue (Figure 2). Other species may excrete large volumes of honeydew, producing sticky, shiny leaves that soon turn black with sooty mold.

Figure 1. An aphid colony developing around an adult female. (Photo: Lee Townsend, UK)



Figure 2. Corrugated appearance of birch leaf from aphid feeding. (Photo: Lee Townsend, UK)



Aphid infestations can develop from eggs laid on host plants the previous autumn or from winged aphids that fly to plants in spring. Winged aphids deposit several wingless young on tender tissue before moving on to find a new plant, scattering their offspring to increase chances of survival. Immature aphids, or nymphs, grow rapidly, maturing in 7 to 10 days. Then they are ready to produce their own live young. Depending on the species and food quality, aphids may produce 20 to 40 offspring. The process is repeated several times, resulting in tremendous population explosions.

Management

Early detection is the key to reducing aphid infestations. Regular inspection of terminal foliage allows early detection of aphid infestations before symptoms develop and while control can be relatively easy and successful. Examine the bud area and undersides of the new leaves for clusters or colonies of small aphids. Small numbers of colonies on small plants can be crushed and infested leaves removed.

Watch for signs of natural enemies at work. Lady beetles (Figures 4 & 5) may be able to deal with moderate numbers of aphids.



Figure 4. Several empty lady beetle pupal cases are evidence of natural control at work. (N. Williamson)



Figure 5. Newly hatched lady beetle larvae (left) should soon find this aphid colony. (Photo: Lee Townsend, UK)

Large, well-developed infestations may warrant an insecticide application on small or newly-established plants. Most products used for aphid control work as contact insecticides. Spray droplets must land on the aphids and be absorbed into their bodies. Thorough spray coverage directed at growing points and protected areas is vital. It is difficult to treat large trees because of the high spray pressure necessary to penetrate the foliage and to reach the tallest portions of the tree. Hose-end sprayers can be used on 15 foot to 20 foot trees but they need to produce a stream, rather than an even pattern, to reach these levels. Skips in coverage are common and there is a significant potential for applicator exposure through drift and runoff. Aphid control is rarely feasible or necessary on healthy plants.

By Lee Townsend, Extension Entomologist

Regional Vegetable Production Field Day

There will be a Regional Vegetable Production Field Day June 13 from 10 AM- 2 PM. It will be addressing High Tunnel Management and Plasticulture Pest ID and Control. It will be held at 5902 Parina Road, Brooksville KY. For more information or to register please call the extension office at 796-2732.

In observance of Memorial Day, our office is closed on Monday, May 28th, 2018.

Sincerely,



Philip Konopka
County Extension Agent
for Agriculture &
Natural Resources

