



Quick Tips for Making Alfalfa Haylage

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1) Start with high quality forage

- if you start with full bloom alfalfa, you start with poor quality forage!
- first cutting: harvest at early bud stage for high quality; for high quality silage for lactating dairy cows, target between 38 and 40% NDF; this is about 150-160 RFV
- use scissors cut method to estimate quality; begin harvest at 10-15 units higher than targeted RFV because of field/harvest losses
- depending on acreage, harvest equipment and weather: start at 35% NDF and complete no later than 40% NDF; alternative would be to make sure you complete harvest no later than 1/10 bloom
- subsequent cuttings: harvest at 28 to 32 d intervals depending on growing season and goals; use longer intervals if stand persistence is the primary importance

2) Harvesting

- goal: minimize time crop is in the field drying; prolonged drying time in the field increases DM losses
- mow after the dew is gone
- when wide swathing, mow only what can be harvested in a day
- wheel damage is a large source of plant damage in the field; use small tractors and avoid duals; minimize travel in the field; do not drive on adjacent fields when harvesting; consider using "sacrifice lanes" for equipment travel
- chop at optimum moisture of between 55 and 60% (range may vary depending on storage structure); avoid chopping when moisture is more than 65% as this may lead to clostridial fermentations
- use a proven microbial inoculant with homolactic acid bacteria (the final application rate must be a minimum of 100,000 colony forming units per gram of wet forage); calibrate and check application frequently; use a liquid applied inoculant if possible
- keep knives sharp and chop at 3/8 to 3/4 inch theoretical (depending on moisture and other forages fed) length for good effective fiber

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