



Agri-News

September 5, 2005

Harvesting alfalfa in the fall

There is a critical fall period when alfalfa should not be harvested. This time period is from four to six weeks before the first killing frost. A killing frost is when night-time temperatures reach about -5°C.

Shorter days, cooler temperatures and drier soils trigger slow growth and the plants will begin storing root reserves for the winter and for growth the following spring. If alfalfa is cut during this period and begins to regrow it will begin using those root reserves. If a killing frost occurs before root reserves are restored (10" or bud stage), then the plant may not have enough reserves for the winter and spring regrowth.

"Cutting during this critical period is less likely to injure a newly established stand of alfalfa than an older stand of three years and older," says Mark Johns, forage specialist, Ag-Info Centre, Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development, Stettler. "Younger stands are healthier and are free of the crown and root diseases. The available nutrients are also higher in younger stands and improve winter survival. However, if you do harvest a stand during the critical fall period, do not repeat this practice the following year."

Fertility is a very important part of winter survival. Alfalfa can fix nitrogen, but it will still require large amounts of the other nutrients. Potassium (K) helps protect the plant tissues from freezing, plays a role in storing winter reserves, and improves resistance to diseases. Phosphorus (P) will help establish strong root systems and promote vigorous spring growth. The most efficient way to provide these nutrients is at the time of establishment.

"Other factors that affect winter survival include variety, fall moisture conditions and soil pH," says Johns. "Not all alfalfa varieties are the same when it comes to winter hardiness. Producers should remember that rapid growth and yield usually come at the cost of winter hardiness."

Alfalfa is best adapted to a soil pH of 6.5. Stands grown in slightly acidic soils (less than 6.0) will be at a greater risk for winter injury and should not be harvested during the critical period.

Wet field conditions in the fall will reduce the amount of dormancy and increase injury from ice sheeting and frost heaving. Dry soils are actually better insulated and hasten the onset of dormancy which will improve winter survival.

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“The best solution is to wait until just before or after the killing frost,” says Johns. “Alfalfa will be difficult to dry under these conditions so it is advised to ensile it. For additional protection over winter, try to leave a six-inch stubble and some uncut strips to help trap snow. Alternatively, moving up that first cutting date could mean that a second cut would fall just before the critical period. Again, the first cut would possibly have to be ensiled to beat the weather.

Contact: *Mark Johns* *Ag-Info Centre*
(403) 742-7901 1-866-882-7677

Peace Country tours demonstrate advantages of reduced tillage and forages

To bring ‘new’ land into production from forest with a minimum amount of tillage is a real challenge. Three reduced tillage demonstrations that were held in the Peace country this summer clearly demonstrated how direct seeding can save time and expenses when breaking new ground.

“Taking treed land and turning it into productive crop land usually requires multiple operations,” says Nick Underwood, Reduced Tillage LINKAGES agronomist, Peace Region, “Ron Anderson, a High Prairie area farmer, used a breaking disc to clear brush and break 120 acres of land. After piling and burning the brush, he rolled the land to press in roots and any small pieces of wood, and then seeded fall rye in June. This approach provides some grazing in the first year, being grazed in the fall and, if not too wet, again the following spring. After spring grazing, this land will be shallow seeded to a pasture mix and rolled. After the rye has been harvested for seed in the fall, the land will become permanent pasture.”

When the Smoky Applied Research Association (SARDA) had a tour at Anderson’s on July 26, 2005, all were impressed with the simplicity of the approach, and with the excellent, even, stand of rye.

At another site near High Prairie, the SARDA tour stopped to look at a field of oats that were to be used as green feed (or yellow feed) this fall. In the spring, the oats were seeded into timothy sod that was sprayed with a litre of Roundup Weather Max last fall.

“Fall is the time to be thinking about spraying forages on land that producers want to seed next spring,” says Underwood. “The field we looked at on the tour had a low input crop. Derby oats that weighed 40 pounds per bushel were seeded at 93 pounds per acre. Nitrogen had been applied at 55 pounds per acre at seeding. Fifteen pounds of phosphate was placed with the seed. A little less than half a litre of MCPA was applied after seeding. The oat stand and the kill on the timothy sod were very impressive.”

Near Nampa, Kevin Krall showed the SARDA tour group a quarter section of Roundup Ready canola that was seeded into creeping red fescue sod. The sod had been sprayed after fescue harvest in fall 2004, with 2 litres of Roundup. It was sprayed again with another half litre as a pre-seed burn-off in the spring. Creeping red fescue is a ‘hard-to-kill’ sod because of its fine leaves and their waxy cuticle. The canola was seeded with a John Deere disc air drill that did a good job of placing the fertilizer where the canola could reach it. As soil bacteria decays, it can tie up nitrogen in sod, making it a challenge to provide the nutrition needed for a decent canola crop.

The canola was in late flowering at the end of July when SARDA had the tour, and the yield potential looked promising. With the aid of Roundup and the right conditions, Krall was able to go from creeping red fescue to canola without doing expensive tillage that would have taken a lot of time.

“All three of these farmers planned and thought ahead about what they were going to do the following year,” says Underwood. “The key is to do some forward planning. The cost of diesel is too high to waste doing unnecessary multiple passes.”

If you are planning to terminate a perennial forage stand:

- August or September are the target months when using glyphosate
- there should be six to eight inches of growth on the forage and it should be actively growing when it is sprayed
- spraying the forage out in the spring usually does not work
- seeding into sod, especially creeping red fescue sod, will require a narrow knife or disk opener for both seed and fertilizer
- a pre-seed burn-off maybe helpful, in order to discourage dandelions and other broadleaved weed
- peas can be seeded into a sod if the field is clean, and they have the advantage of fixing their own nitrogen. However, forage re-growth, if there is any, cannot be controlled until harvest in a pea crop.

Contact: *Nick Underwood*
(780) 539-4498

Alberta conservation projects to share \$1.2 million in grants

In April 2006, the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) will approve up to \$1.2 million in project grants to a wide variety of individuals and groups in Alberta.

Since 2002, ACA’s Grant Eligible Conservation Fund has approved 227 projects that have made a significant contribution to conservation in Alberta.

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“This program supports the efforts of conservation groups and individuals, with funding they might not find from other sources,” says Garry Scrimgeour, ACA’s manager of Science and Research. “In some cases, there’s also a leveraging effect. Having ACA funding might allow groups to qualify for other conservation-related grants. Overall, the grants play a key role in building conservation capacity among these organizations.”

In early 2005, ACA approved 67 projects under the Grant Eligible Conservation Fund program, totaling just under \$1.2 million. This was from a pool of 120 applications requesting nearly \$3 million in project funding.

The 2005 projects covered many Alberta regions and addressed a broad range of conservation interests: fisheries, wildlife, habitat and recreational issues. For a complete list of projects, visit the ACA website www.ab-conservation.com.

A few of these projects include:

- compiling an Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta
- enhancing habitat and post interpretive signs at Cochrane’s Big Hill Creek
- studying how bobcat and long-tailed weasel use wooded parts of agricultural land on Alberta’s prairies
- identifying essential habitat for burrowing owls
- assessing the economic benefits of recreational fishing on the Bow River between Canmore and Bassano
- studying cougar predation on wild ungulates in a multi-prey, multi-predator system in West-Central Alberta
- Hardisty Creek Restoration Project (HCRP) in the Hinton area
- new field techniques for estimating wolf densities and predation rates in the Central East Slopes of Alberta, including models for wolf sightability and kill-site identification
- late-fall fisheries investigation on Southern Alberta’s diversion canals

A similar level of funding, nearly \$1.2 million, will be available for projects funded in 2006.

David Fairless, ACA’s provincial programs coordinator, explains that the program is intended to reach out to a wide variety of interested parties.

“Any individual or organization in Alberta can apply,” says Fairless. “Applications come from members of the public, community groups and conservation groups that want to do significant conservation work.” Staff members of ACA and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) are not eligible to apply for funding under this fund.

Two application forms are available. A simplified short-form application is for grant requests of \$2,000 or less. The standard grant application is for amounts over \$2,000. The smallest grant approved last year was for \$300, the largest was for \$60,000, with the average project grant being \$18,000.

A funding committee composed of three non-voting ACA Board members and 10 private citizens assesses applications. Funded projects must advance ACA’s mission – to conserve, protect and enhance Alberta’s biological natural resources – as well as address a well-defined issue or problem in an achievable way.

The application process isn’t just a yes-or-no exercise. Unsuccessful applicants receive ACA’s advice on how to improve their chances next time. “We can’t fund everyone,” says Fairless, “but it’s our job is to help them in any way we can.”

Fairless urges interested groups and individuals to be aware of the program’s key deadlines. Final funding criteria guidelines will be published on December 15, 2005. The window for ACA to receive applications is from **January 1 to 31, 2006**. Grants will be reviewed by ACA in February, for projects extending from April 2006 to March 2007.

“All project applicants are making a vital contribution to the cause of conservation in Alberta,” says Scrimgeour. “These organizations have a wealth of keen, creative volunteers and they get results. These people have a great heart for conservation, and we’re here to support their work.”

Groups and individuals who have a project in mind that can assist and advance conservation in Alberta, whether that projects is big or small, are encouraged to apply to ACA’s Grant Eligible Conservation Fund by January 31, 2006. For more information, visit the website at www.ab-conservation.com.

Contact: *Alberta Conservation Association*
(780) 427-5192

2006 farm direct marketing conference in Texas

North American farmers and ranchers will be heading south to Texas in 2006 to discover the potential of farm direct marketing during the annual conference of the North American Farmers’ Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA). The conference is being held on January 13 and 14, 2006, in Austin, Texas, at the Hyatt Regency Austin. The conference includes a trade show that will feature more than 40 exhibitors.

“The conference is part of the 21st annual NAFDMA convention,” says Kerry Engel, ag-entrepreneurship division, Farm Direct Marketing Initiative, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and NAFDMA director for Canada West, Westlock. “The convention is one of the premiere farm direct marketing events in the world. Past attendees have come from as far as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Japan and Australia. In addition to the two-day conference, the convention includes a three-day pre-conference bus tour, a day of intensive workshops and an advanced-level post-conference bus tour.”

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The convention theme is *Discover Potential*. The goal is to help farmers and ranchers discover potential in themselves, their farms and the farm direct marketing industry. To achieve this goal, NAFDMA brings together some of the best speakers from the farm direct marketing industry, including farmers and ranchers.

The keynote address will delve deep into industry trends. Keynote speakers Brent Warner and Ed Mahoney will help conference attendees discover potential in a variety of areas. They'll share information that is sure to inspire.

"Warner is a direct marketing specialist with the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture in Victoria, B.C., and secretary of NAFDMA," explains Engel. "He is one of the farm direct marketing industry's leading experts and is co-author of *Marketing on the Edge: A Marketing Guide for Progressive Farmers*. Mahoney is an associate professor in the Department of Park, Recreation and Tourism Resources at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. Both Warner and Mahoney are well known and highly respected in North America's farm direct marketing industry. Together, they'll tie the trends into many of the conference's educational sessions."

In addition to educational sessions, the conference will feature an opportunity to visit a local Austin farmers' market. A bus will take conference attendees to and from Sunset Valley Farmers' Market, which is run by NAFDMA member Pamela Boyar.

The pre-conference bus tour features a number of different tour options, from agri-tourism to on-farm retail. The pre-conference tour will be based at the Sheraton Gunter Hotel in San Antonio. Tour options include Farmers' Markets; Animals and Adventure; and Peaches, Plants & PYO. All tour options will combine educational tour stops with a little bit of local Texas flavor. All tours will stop at Wildseed Farms in Fredericksburg as well as The Farm Country Club in Bandera. Most tours will have lunch in Luckenbach, and all will conclude with dinner at Pedrotti's North Wind Ranch in San Antonio. Each tour will have a limited number of buses. Buses will be filled on a first-paid, first-reserved basis.

"A day of workshops will be held on January 12, 2006," says Engel. "Workshops will include a combination of beginner and advanced level topics, such as Farm Direct Marketing and Agri-tourism 101, Farmers' Markets 101, Advanced Retail Detail and Interpretive Training: How to Tell Your Story.

"And after you've had the chance to really get excited about farm direct opportunities and possibilities, you can join the post-conference bus tour that is heading a little further south for an intensive, two-day, advanced level tour."

For convention information, visit www.nafdma.com, e-mail info@nafdma.com or call (413) 529-0386. Registration will be available on-line beginning October 1, 2005. An early registration discount is available until December 6, 2005.

The NAFDMA is the leading farm direct marketing association in the world. It promotes and fosters the growth of farm direct marketing throughout North America. Its members support their family farms by selling millions of dollars worth of farm-grown produce directly to consumers at farm stands, farmers' markets, pick-your-own farms, consumer-supported agriculture, agri-tourism venues, and other ever-growing innovations in direct producer-to-consumer agricultural marketing methods. The 2007 NAFDMA conference will be hosted by Alberta in February 2007.

Contact: Kerry Engel
(780) 349-4466

Agri-News Briefs

Food processing safety training

The Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA) is hosting two workshops in Edmonton on Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) planning for processors. These two-day courses are designed to explain and enhance food safety during production and processing. The two courses being held in September are:

- HACCP I: **Documenting Your Prerequisite Programs** – prior to developing a specific HACCP plan, it is critical that effective prerequisite programs have been developed, implemented and documented. This course provides information about necessary steps and procedures to control operating conditions for the production of safe food.
- HACCP II: **Development of Your HACCP Plan** – an ideal training tool for newly-formed HACCP Teams, including plant staff, quality assurance departments, HACCP Coordinators, supervisors and managers who need an understanding of HACCP Prerequisites and the principles of HACCP. The course provides information on identifying hazards, implementing and documenting the seven HACCP principles and developing monitoring procedures and corrective actions.

Dates and course registration costs:

- HACCP I: September 12 and 13, 2005 – \$560 for AFPA members and \$915 for non-members
- HACCP II: September 14 and 16, 2005 – \$725 for AFPA members and \$1180 for non-members

For further information or to register, contact Melody Pashko with AFPA at (403) 201-3657 Ext 21 or safety@afpa.com. For information on other locations and dates, visit the AFPA website at www.afpa.comsnq for additional course information.

Rare and exotic fall sale

The annual Rare and Exotic Fall Sale is being held once again at the Lloydminster Agriculture Exhibition grounds in the Alberta Building. The event begins at 8:00 a.m. and features many different types of livestock, exotic fowl and rare breeds on exhibit and for sale. For further information, contact Sam Hardstaff, Lloydminster Agricultural Exhibition Association Ltd., at (306) 825-5571, fax: 306-825-7017 or e-mail sam@lloydexh.com.

Devonian Botanic Garden's '05 courses

The Fall 2005 course brochure from the University of Alberta's Devonian Botanic Garden (DBG) is now available. Horticulture courses are offered on a wide variety of subjects, including fall pruning, orchids for the windowsill, residential landscape design, water garden construction. Art courses, including instruction in watercolour painting, acrylic painting, landscape photography, carving, soap making and cattail coil basketry, to name a few are also featured during the fall and winter months. Most courses, scheduled for evenings or weekends, are one to three sessions in length. DBG also offers Saturday walks with a garden horticulturist. This is a great opportunity to stroll through the gardens and pick up tips on native plants, trees, shrubs, borders and planning and planting a garden masterpiece. The DBG is located five kilometres north of Devon on Highway 60, just 15 minutes southwest of Edmonton. The Gardens feature indoor classrooms, work areas, greenhouses, as well as 40 acres of cultivated plants and 190 acres of rolling sand dunes and mixed woodland vegetation with an extensive nature trail system. For further information or to receive a copy of the Courses and Education Program brochure, contact the DBG registration desk at (780) 987-2064, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.