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The GRAIN GROWERS' GUIDE, WINNIPEG, Man.

ALFALFA TIPS

Plan to do everything quick when you work with alfalfa.

Cutting should commence when 10 per cent. of the plants are in bloom. As soon as the green sprouts begin to show at the roots of the alfalfa there is nothing to be gained by leaving it stand any longer.

Under no conditions should alfalfa be raked, bunched or stored while it is wet with dew or rain. If this is done it is liable to heat.

Cut alfalfa on a day that promises to be fair. Set the mower bar so that it will cut high enough to not injure the young shoots. If rain prevents the cutting of the crop until the shoots are longer, set the cutting bar higher still. Clipping off these fresh growths delays the development of the following crop.

In harvesting alfalfa three things should be remembered: First, that its feeding value is greatest if cut just after blooming has commenced; second, that the leaves which fall off with the slightest provocation when dry contain by far the most valuable part of the crop, and third, that rains not only discolor the crop and make it less palatable and less digestible but also remove in solution much of the nutritious part of the fodder.

In order to save the greatest part of the leaves the curing of alfalfa in cocks is recommended. It takes more time but makes far better hay. Bake shortly after cutting and bunch immediately. It may be necessary to turn the bunches out a few hours before stacking to let the lower layer next the ground dry out. Do not make the bunches too big; they may mould and heat.

The curing process that goes on after the alfalfa is cut is quite remarkable. Neither the leaves nor the stems are dead. The life processes of the plant continue and the moisture moves up the stem to the leaves, resulting in a uniform drying of the hay. The leaves act as pumps in their dying attempts to secure more moisture.

When hay has been stored in the mow or the stack after being thoroughly cured in the cock it will retain its bright green color. If it is stored a little on the green side, while the stems still contain a considerable amount of plant juice, heating and fermentation occur in the stack and a very aromatic and palatable brown hay results. It should not, however, be stored so green that it will heat or mould.

There will be no hay the first year. The second year the alfalfa will be ready for cutting and two crops will be available for the growing season. To get the best quality of hay the cutting must be done when the plants start to blossom, which will be the latter part of June the first time and early in August for the second time. The crop should not be cut late in the season. Alfalfa should not remain exposed in the swath for any length of time.

The first year the field should be clipped with a mower when the alfalfa and weeds are about six inches high, and the clippings may remain on the field to form a mulch. This will hold the weeds in check. For the alfalfa it is best to have the cutting bar of the mower set so that it will not injure the crown of the plant. It is advisable to clip two or three times during the summer. The last clipping should not be later than August 15, because considerable growth should remain on the field as a winter protection.

It is highly desirable to keep stock from grazing on alfalfa the first year. In fact, alfalfa should not be pastured extensively at any time, and no grazing should be contemplated until the crop is thoroughly established and the plant roots well developed. The field should be at its best the third or fourth year after seeding. Pasturing close the first year will have a tendency to injure the alfalfa crowns, and where the stock are allowed to run at will the surface of the field may be roughened by tramping when the soil is wet.

The practicability of the various ways of getting alfalfa hay into condition for the mow or stack will depend largely upon the locality, local weather conditions and the ultimate value and use of the hay. Just which method should be used is largely a matter of the farmer's individual judgment.