

Preparation for Alfalfa Planting

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I don't know if this is going to be a good year to start alfalfa. Normally we'd be spending this time getting ready to plant alfalfa late in August and then September rains would get the crop up and going. We don't know if that will happen or not. BUT, if you want to be ready to plant just in case, then we need to do two things first of all. Figure out what herbicides you've applied on that field in the past 24 months and then determine if there's going to be any carryover risk. You don't want to risk planting high priced alfalfa seed into soil that has herbicide carryover that's going to kill your seedlings. Only after you've cleared that hurdle, the next step is to take a soil test. Just a nice sample of the top 4 to 5 inches is all you need. I want to know what the soil pH is and what the phosphorus levels are. Alfalfa needs a neutral soil pH. I've been averaging at least one new alfalfa seeding a year that I've been called in on that is struggling because the soil pH is too acid. And once the alfalfa is planted it is hard to fix that. If the pH is below about 6.2 we are going to want to apply and incorporate some lime to neutralize that acidity. If phosphorus levels are below about 20 to 25 ppm we also want to get some phosphorus applied, which can be done at the same time as you are applying the lime. We can kind of treat this after the fact but let's get both issues dealt with at once so we don't have to worry about it. Then, IF the rains appear to be coming on in, we are ready to plant the alfalfa and get it started right! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Soil Testing for Nitrates

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When we apply nitrogen fertilizer to a crop we do so with the sole belief that we will have rain that will take the nitrogen into the soil and allow the crop to grow at a normal rate so that it can take the nitrates up and use it for normal plant growth. Given the weather that we had in May, June, and July I have no reason to believe that any of this happened in a normal fashion this year. The fate of nitrogen is to be taken up by the plant to be used in growth, volatilize into the atmosphere or washed out of the bottom of the root zone by irrigation or rainfall. Normal just wasn't in the vocabulary this year. When normal doesn't occur nitrogen can actually remain in the soil available for future plant growth. There's no way to predict with any certainty the fate of that nitrogen. We can assume that 80% of it is still there when only 20% is still present, the rest having volatilized into the atmosphere. We can assume that 20% of the applied nitrogen is present when far more of it is still there. The only way to know for sure is to do a profile soil test. I know the terror of thinking about doing a 24 inch profile soil test so I'll make a deal with you. Only do a 12 inch test. Unless it starts to pour rain, that nitrogen hasn't gone very deep yet. Pull a surface test for everything else and then just do a 12 inch test for mobile nutrients like nitrogen and while we're at it let's do sulfur and chloride too. Might as well get you money's worth for the sweat equity you've put in. Then we'll know what we've got! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Locust and Hedge Tree Control

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Two of the woody species that I hear many complaints about in pastures are thorny locust, aka honeylocust and hedge, more correctly known as Osage orange. Here's the big problem with both of them. If you cut them down and then treat the freshly cut stump with the appropriate herbicide, you will do a good job of killing the main trunk. But a year or two down the road, all of a sudden you have root shoots coming up all over the place! Unfortunately, that's just the nature of these trees and black locust can be like this as well, we just don't seem to find as much of it. So here's a trick that seems to help with that root sprouting issue. Kill the tree first with a basal bark treatment. Wait for it to get good and dead then cut it down. The time to basal bark treat trees is mid July through mid January. A basal bark treatment requires mixing triclopyr in diesel fuel or kerosene - essentially one quart of triclopyr with 3 quarts of diesel fuel OR PastureGard HL, which is triclopyr plus fluroxypur, also as a 25% solution. Then spray this all the way around the trunk of the tree, the bottom 12 to 15 inches up from the ground. Soak this area to the point of just starting to runoff, then walk away and wait for it to die. For honeylocust or black locust you can also use Milestone as long as the trunks are less than 6 inches in diameter. This would be a good choice for when you have a lot of small stems coming up. Milestone is very active on legume plants, but won't do anything on hedge trees. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Time to Wrap Up Native Hay Harvesting

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I've been seeing a lot of prairie hay getting swathed and baled the past couple of weeks. Yes, even more than normal for late July. I suspect that the motivation for this is to get what we can while we can. I haven't been able to talk yields with as many folks as I would normally like to but I'm guess half to two thirds a normal crop. I can also understand why some folks might be waiting to cut just in case we do start to get enough rain to get some additional growth. But I'm going to discourage that, especially this year. If we do start getting enough rain to get some good grass growth, that new growth is going to be high quality forage, almost as good as May and June native grass. But all that new growth is also an effort by the plants to survive and get food reserves laid into the root system before the plants shut down for winter. Last week I mentioned the impact of heavy grazing on August or September regrowth and haying can be just as damaging or more so. If you go out in late August and mow off some fresh new regrowth, you start that plant in all over putting up new growth to try to restore what was lost. A plant that was already stressed with low root reserves get's stressed again. So for all of these reasons, start wrapping up the native hay harvest season. Normally I'd be saying that because of declining quality that we see in late summer prairie hay. This year I'm suggesting you wrap up harvesting purely and simply for the health of the grass plants and the native prairies. It's been a tough year! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Soybeans as an Emergency Forage

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I had someone ask me a couple of weeks ago if it was time to start swathing the soybeans to bale. I told them that it was a little bit early for making that decision and we had a good rain a few days after that. BUT we can make a fairly good quality hay or silage out of soybeans but the problem is that to make the best quality forage you have to swath them while they still have quite a few leaves on them as leaves contain a lot of the feed value. Back in 2012, which is probably the last time we harvested any soybeans for forage, I remember telling someone that to make the best quality forage out of soybeans you had to pull the trigger a few days before a good rain would still save them as a grain crop. For that reason I think we rarely take that step. Soybeans, being a legume have good protein, although yields are often not that great. 1 to 3½ tons per acre, dry matter basis, is the expected range. Crude protein can run in the upper teens to 20%. Fiber is often rather low. But that assumes you are putting them up with still quite a few green leaves. Most people will roll them up as hay although drying is a bit of a challenge, but not as challenging as corn. You can put them into silage but pure soybean silage is not very palatable to cattle. It works a lot better if you can mix the soybeans with a grass of any kind at harvest by direct cut. The grass proportion will greatly enhance the palatability. Two loads of grass (which could be sorghum, sudan or corn) with 1 load of beans is probably ideal. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.