

CROP NOTES for May 22, 2009 – PEAQ Report

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<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/winneshiek/info/crops.htm>

Iowa State University Extension Information for Northeast Iowa

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PEAQ for May 22, 2009

Timing First-Crop Alfalfa

Predictive Equations for Alfalfa Quality (PEAQ) is a method used to estimate forage quality of a standing alfalfa crop. The field estimation is based on the height of the tallest stem and the maturity stage of the field. It has worked very well as a “ball-park” indicator to estimate harvest time for first-crop alfalfa. The following Fact Sheet explains the PEAQ procedure, and can be used to estimate timeliness of first-crop harvest of your own fields.

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/NR/rdonlyres/11CD336E-1D82-427F-9922-49A4C48230AF/12306/FactSheetBL22.pdf>

On average alfalfa quality will drop 3 to 5 points in RFV per day in spring. It is recommended to produce alfalfa forage around 150 RFV for milking dairy herds, and 120 to 130 RFV for heifers, stocker cattle and lactating beef cattle. Under typical hay harvest conditions, 15% of the forage dry matter will be lost. Therefore, it is suggested to cut at PEAQ readings of 165 to 170 RFV (bud stage alfalfa about 27-inches tall) to end up with harvested forage of approximately 150 RFV.

A random sampling of fields across northeast Iowa are being checked for PEAQ twice a week (Monday & Thursday).

PEAQ Results for Thursday May 21:

County, Height (inches), Stage of maturity, RFV

Allamakee, 21, Bud, 196

Butler, 26, Bud, 174

Chickasaw site A, 23, Bud, 185

Chickasaw site B, 26, Bud, 172

Delaware, 26, Bud, 172

Dubuque, 24, Bud, 181

Floyd site A, 22, Vegetative, 200

Floyd site B, 20, Vegetative, 210

Floyd site C, 22, Vegetative, 200

Howard, 16, Vegetative, 237

Winneshiek, 24, Vegetative, 190

In general, the timing first crop harvest can be summarized based on 4 different situations:

- 1) Dairy Quality Forage. Based on PEAQ, bud stage alfalfa about 27 inches tall should provide about 150 RFV harvested hay. Right now some fields are that far along and others are not.
- 2) Winter-Injured Stands. Those fields affected more so by the winter are further behind (height and stage) and are also weaker stands. They should be allowed to develop to a more mature stage (develop some blooms) to store more root carbohydrates to regain more normal vigor.
- 3) Beef quality hay usually is not harvested until bloom stage.
- 4) Weather forecast. Of course it is key to avoid rained-on hay. Some of the harvest occurring right now may be a bit early relative to PEAQ, but this week's weather forecast has favored making hay.

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