



MFGA Green Gold Report – June 14 , 2021 – CENTRAL

Reports for Optimum Alfalfa Harvest Date cover Manitoba’s Central, Western, Eastern and Interlake areas.

SITE	RFV NIR	RFV PEAQ	Height	CP
Austin	-	-	-	-
Gladstone	-	-	-	-
Horndean	-	-	-	-
MacGregor	166	216	21	23
Manitou – Central	-	-	-	-
Manitou – South of Town	170	204	23	21
St. Leon	-	-	-	-
Treherne	151	178	24	22
CENTRAL AVERAGE	162	199	19	22

The rain and heat has created a growth spurt in the central area. The RFV has increased by 12 pts or 2.4 pts/day in 5 days.

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Cutting Height in Hay Fields: How Low Can You Go?

With haying just getting started it's important to pay attention to cutting height in your hay crop. One of the goals is to maximize yield; however, cutting a hay crop too low can lead to several negative issues. With the introduction of the disk-type mowers (discbines) it has allowed for cutting very close to the ground. Stand longevity can be compromised when the crop is cut too low. As a general rule, alfalfa can be cut closer to the ground than our grass hay crops. We need to think about where energy reserves are stored in the crop. For alfalfa, carbohydrates are stored below ground in the taproot. Grass hay crops store their energy above ground in the stem base or tillers. Frequent mowing at a close height will continue to deplete these energy reserves, resulting in stand longevity issues. The second consequence for mowing too close to the ground is increased ash content of the forage. All forage has a natural ash content of approximately 6%. However, mowing too closely with disk mowers can add soil to the crop, and increase the ash content by as much as 10-12% (18% ash content in total analysis). If we all had table-top smooth fields, it would also be much easier to make a closer cut across all fields. However, things such as groundhog holes and the unevenness of fields can add to increased ash content of our harvested forage.

So how low can you go? The best answer is...it depends! If you have grasses involved, you must keep cutting height higher than a pure stand of legume, if you want to keep the grass in the stand. Keep in mind these are **minimum** recommendations; it's okay to mow higher than the numbers below.

Alfalfa

- 2" minimum. Some literature shows a cutting height of 1" will not reduce stand longevity, but remember the increased ash content issue. Also, keep in mind that frequent cutting at early maturity will continue to deplete carbohydrate reserves. One cutting of alfalfa should be allowed to reach the bloom stage each year.

Cool Season Grasses (Orchardgrass, Timothy)

- 4" during the establishment year
- 3" minimum during production years. This is where we see most of our stand longevity issues. Frequent cutting of cool season grasses at a low height will continue to deplete energy reserves.

Mixed stands

- You must manage for the predominant species. Do you have a grass stand with some alfalfa, or an alfalfa stand with some grass?
- Alfalfa with some grass: 2.5" minimum
- Grass with some alfalfa: 3" minimum (if you want to keep the grass stand!)

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