



MFGA Green Gold Report – June 7, 2021 – WESTERN

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

SITE	RFV NIR	RFV PEAQ	Height	CP
Bellevue	-	-	-	-
Forrest-Brookdale Station - MBFI	174	229	16	23
Forrest	179	-	-	25
Grandview	-	-	-	-
Oak River	203	204	20	27
Miniota	-	-	-	-
Reston	-	-	-	-
Roseland	-	-	-	-
Souris	198	235	15	26
WESTERN AVERAGE	188	223	17	25

Shorter staged alfalfa is being recorded due to the lack of moisture. The heat will drive the fields to grow without much moisture so the height of the alfalfa is starting to end up being about the same height. The RFV has dropped by 48 pts or 9.6 pts/day in 5 days. Optimum Alfalfa Harvest Date would be on or around June 11.

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Looking at the information above the missing crop height information for the Central area is due to the crop still being too short to sample (less than 10"). The sites with missing RFV and CP information are due to not having that information at the time this report is being sent out.

Cutting Height in Forages Whether you're taking the crop as haylage or dry hay, it's important to pay attention to forage cutting height. One goal is to maximize yield; however, cutting a crop too low can lead to several negative issues. The introduction of the disk-type mowers (discbines) allows for cutting very close to the ground (scalped). This differs considerably from the older sickle bar mowers (haybines), whose technology required that some level of stubble height remain. 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 crops. We need to think about where energy reserves are stored in the crop. For alfalfa, carbohydrates are stored below the ground in the taproot. Grasses 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).

So, the million-dollar question is how low can you go? 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 OK to mow higher than the numbers below. Here are Minimum cutting height recommendations:

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 **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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