



MFGA Green Gold Report – June 1, 2022 – EASTERN/INTERLAKE

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

SITE	RFV NIR	RFV PEAQ	Height	CP
Beausejour	-	-	-	-
Garson	-	-	-	-
Grunthal	254	237	16	36
West St.Paul	235	237	16	25
Headingley	-	-	-	-
EASTERN AVERAGE	245	237	16	31

The growth of the alfalfa has slowed down due to the wet and cooler weather. The height is considered to be in the early vegetative state.

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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 percent. However, mowing too closely with disk mowers can add soil to the crop, and increase the ash content by as much as 10-12 percent (18 percent ash content in total analysis).

So, the million-dollar question is how low can you go? Where grasses are 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 of 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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