

## Early September Alfalfa Management and Decisions

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All good alfalfa stands in the Maritimes deserve some early September TLC. This should be in the form of a proper fall rest period (**no cutting after Labour Day**), applying some lime to insure soil pH is in the 6.3 – 6.6 range, and topping up soil potassium levels if required. Our high percentage alfalfa mixtures are generally pulling 120 – 150 units of potassium ( $K_2O$ ) out of the soil for good 2-cut yields. If you have applied 60 – 75 K for 1<sup>st</sup> cut (e.g. 200 – 250 lbs/cc of 10-10-30 +.2B) and then applied 3000 – 4000 gallons/acre of manure after 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> cutting then you've replaced the potassium that the crop has withdrawn. For alfalfa fields however, that haven't had these amounts of potassium applied or soil test under 350 – 400 kg/ha of  $K_2O$ , then apply 100 – 150 kg/ha of 0-0-60 in early September to improve soil potash levels and the wintering ability of these good alfalfa stands.

The other alfalfa management decision you need to make is when to “pull the plug” on some of those older stands. The 4 – 6 year old 80:20 alfalfa/timothy stands that are starting to look like 80% weeds and 20% forage. If some of your fields fit into this category then serve them a glyphosate – MCPA cocktail in late September before it gets too frosty and rotate them into corn for 1-2 years. Dr. Dan Undersander from University of Wisconsin reports that in alfalfa variety trials over the past 20 years, yields are highest in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> production years, have an average yield decline of 15% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> production year and almost 30% drop in the 4<sup>th</sup> production year. If you wish to get 4 – 6 production years out of an alfalfa stand perhaps consider using a 50:30:20 mixture by weight of alfalfa/reed canary/timothy or alfalfa/orchardgrass/timothy. Adding reed canary or orchardgrass requires earlier harvesting, and would not be recommended on the majority of your acreage.

Lastly, it should be emphasized that good alfalfa stands start off with good seedling establishments. Thick alfalfa-grass catches are best achieved from direct seeding, seeding prior to mid-May (late August also works most times) and having a firm seedbed which sometimes requires pre-rolling and definitely always rolling after seeding.

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