

Weekly Article

9-19-2022

Price of Making Hay

Hello, my Name is Richard Purdin with OSU Extension, Ag and Natural Resource Educator and Community Development Educator for Adams County. I hope to better inform local producers and the public of the latest news in the world of agriculture. I hate to sound like a broken record but where in the world does time go! We are entering the latter half of September, the tree leaves are turning, corn and soybeans are dying down, and the wooly caterpillars are starting to cross the road (sure sign of fall). The past week has been a pleasantly dry warm week and for many producers this gave them an opportunity to get some much-needed field work completed. From baling hay to chopping silage, this was a very busy week in the fields of Adams County. The Annual Farm Science Review is taking place this week and this year marks the 60th anniversary for the event. Many pieces of equipment and technology that was used on the farm 60 years ago was displayed. The farm science review is a traditional last field day event many producers attend before harvest season begins and they take up room and board in the combine! I continue to scout the fields even as things mature and begin to die. My fall army worm trap came in a little higher this week, but numbers remain small. Stink bugs continue to be high and something to watch as harvest begins. Some alfalfa stands are showing late season common leaf spot diseases. And pastures are beginning to slow down in growth as the weather has turned more summer like. Burley Harvest continues on, but much of the final acreage is being housed. Corn silage harvest also continues and average to above average yields have been recorded. Fall feeder calf auctions are remaining very strong and the prices are very welcoming to local cattlemen. Late season hay cuttings have been made and yield have been average but for many taking the last hay cutting was well worth it. I have received a few questions on the economics of making hay this late vs grazing and this is what I would like to discuss today.

Since I have received questions on economics of making hay and this year every penny count; I decided to do some estimating and budgeting based off some real-life experiences on my own farm. So, the question at hand is the price of making hay worth pulling the mower out for?

Scenario- Farmer Richard has 10 ac of some hay that is supposed to be orchard grass and fescue mixed hay (key word supposed to be), but most of the hay has been

overtaken with yellow foxtail and fall panicum. Farmer Richard is debating whether to mow the hay, bush hog it, or graze it?

Answer- The classic extension answer is that it depends and truly it does. Factors such as Farmer Richard's current hay supply, field location, infrastructure such as fence, labor, water availability and many more should be considered.

Budget-

- expected yield = 1.5 tons per acre and current value is estimated at \$50 ton = \$75/ acre or \$750 for 10 acres of hay.
- Cost to make hay includes fertilizer. Farmer Richard is pretty tight, so he decides to skip that since fertilizer prices are so high. Richard still has to count for removal of nutrients, roughly 60 lbs. of nitrogen is removed at a value of .90/per unit = \$54/ac or \$540 for 10ac. 18lbs of phosphorus is removed at about .90/per unit value= \$16.20/ac or 162 for 10 ac. A whopping 157 lbs. of potassium is removed at a value of .68/unit = 106.76/ac or 1,068 for 10 ac. The price of fuel and oil is estimated at around \$35/ ac and wear and tear on equipment can be estimated at \$15 /ac. If farmer Richard charges his time at \$15.00/hour x 8 hours = \$120. Total variable cost = \$346/ac or \$3,460 for 10 acres.
- Return above variable cost = - 271.96 ac.

So, what if Farmer Richard just bushhogs it? Cutting or using a rotary mower to control weeds from going to seed can be a good option, no nutrients are being removed and weed suppression can occur if done at the proper time. On the other hand, there is a cost. Farmer Richard owns a 10 ft rotary mower and runs about 4 mph. He can mow 4.3 acres an hour and he estimates he uses 8 gallons of diesel fuel per hour. It would take 2.5 hours to finish the 10 ac and about 20 gallons of fuel x \$4.30/gal = \$86 for 10 acres or \$8.60/ac + \$5/ac wear and tear on equipment + \$6/ac in time spent = a total variable cost of \$19.60/ac to mow the field.

Last option graze - Options of grazing the hay field is an option. Farmer Richard has fence and water available. The water is county water which comes at a cost of .5 a gallon. He estimates that he can graze 1.5 animal units per acre or 15 head of 1000 lb. cows for 6.5 days 15 cows consume 450 lbs. dm forage a day or 3% of body weight divide this by an estimated yield of 1.5 tons of dry matter yield = 6.6 days. This can save 1.5 tons of fed hay or \$750 at \$50/ton market price not including time and fuel spent feeding the hay. Some nutrients are absorbed into the animal, but most are recycled back into the soil.

Question- which option do you think farmer Richard should choose?

Ag Educator Words of Wisdom – “When tillage begins other arts will follow. The farmer, therefore, is the founder of civilization” - Daniel Webster