

## Community News

August, 2017

A question asked often is “what are you growing on the farm”? Most people know about the cow herd, the chicken flock and the gardens but the one product that is not often mentioned or even realized as a crop is ...**grass**. Yes, we grow grass which we most often refer to as **hay**. Hay is dried vegetation, usually legumes like alfalfa or clover or grasses like timothy, brome, fescue and orchardgrass. Hay can grow just about anywhere but it can be a “poor competitor” with other plants. When establishing (or re-establishing) a hay field, often another “helper” crop is grown along with it until the hay field is established. A “helper” crop could be oats or wheat. The “helper” crop grows faster and protects the grasses from being damaged.

Hay fields can grow any number of legume or grass plants but the variety of plant(s) chosen will depend on the climate, the type of livestock being raised, water availability and tonnage needed. How to choose the plants for the hayfield? Most would say let the local preferences be your guide. What grows well in the area in which you are farming, is usually the best way to go. We grow alfalfa and clover, timothy, brome, fescue and orchardgrass.

Hay can be found in permanent meadows or as part of a rotation plan on a farm. Using a rotation plan helps to establish uniform soil fertility. A permanent meadow plan provides some winter pasture, erosion control and is good for marginal land. We use both methods.

Reseeding hayfields is necessary. Most hayfields will give a good yield for about five years without reseeding, if the fields are cut and manure is spread on them. At the end of that time, plans for reseeding are usually being made. Hay has been and continues to grow well without chemical fertilizers. Hay harvested from this type of chemically free growth is better for the livestock. We reseed about every 5 years and spread manure every winter in some of the fields on the farm.

There are three steps in turning grass into hay.

1. Cutting the grass when it has reached maturity, followed by partial drying of the grass.
2. Windrowing or raking the grass into rows which allows for further drying.
3. Baling the dried grass (hay) for storage.

The farm has the equipment to cut and rake the hay but we hire the baling out to a local farmer, although both Chris and Josh help with the baling. The hay is pulled into large round bales that weigh about 800-1200 pounds a bale. They stand about 4 foot wide x 5 foot tall.

The round bales are hauled back to the barn where some are stored in the barn and some are wrapped and sealed to protect the hay from damage and molding. The wrapped hay is stored outside on the north side of the barn. The very large, white, round rows of hay are visible if you stop by the farm. We need to bale about 300 to 325 bales to feed the cows through the winter months.

We have about 50 acres in hayfield with 27 acres on the farm proper and about 20 acres across St. Mary's Road from the farm. This acreage yields about 70% of the hay needed for the herd. We also have about 60 acres in pasture land that the herd rotates through and grazes. Much of the remaining land on the farm is in Classified Forest, gardens, rented out to local farmers or has buildings and/or roadways on it. We also cut and bale 24 acres we do not own in exchange for the hay baled on the property.

If we have a good growing year and can manage to get three good cuttings of hay, we can produce about all of the hay needed for the winter. Please join us in praying for a good growing year, three cuttings of hay and a happy, well fed herd of cows.