



County	Contact	Premium Hay (\$/ton)	Top Quality Hay (\$/ton)	Other Hay (\$/ton)	Cut Complete/ Condition/ Market Activity
Chaves	Sandra Barraza, County Agent	\$140-150 large (Del); \$200-220 small bales in barn	\$130+ large (Del)	\$110-125 large striped	4 th cut 95%; 5 th cut 25%; Very low activity; Hay being put up in barns.
Dona Ana	Rafa Realivasquez, County Agent	\$175 large; \$6.00-6.50/bale small	\$155 large; \$4.50-5.00/bale	\$135 large; \$3.00-3.75/bale	5 th cut 100%; Dairies waiting on better prices; Horse hay moving well
Eddy	Woods Houghton, County Agent	\$175 large; \$180-210 small bales	\$145-170 large; \$170-190 small	\$145-160 light stripe (big); \$125-150 lesser quality	4 th cut 100%; Market variable; 40% of 1-3 cut in barn, 70% of 4-5 cut in barn
Hidalgo	Christy Rubio, County Agent	None available	\$145 large	\$95 oat hay; \$70 rained on	5 th 90%, 6 th 30%; most contracted; some stacked, small % of root rot
Lea	Wayne Cox, County Agent	\$185-190 large; \$200-205 small	\$170-180 large; \$190 small	\$155 and up	5 th cut 90%
Luna	Jack Blandford, County Agent	\$125-135; \$4.50/bale custom	\$110-115; \$4.00/bale custom	<\$110; depends on damage	75%+ of 4 th ; Dairy market slow; Horse and cow hay picking up in dry weather
Torrance	Gene Winn, County Agent	\$135-160	\$120-140	\$90-120	3 rd 80%; Market activity is fair

Spring and Fall Harvest Management for Persistence

Leonard Lauriault, Forage Agronomist, NMSU Agric. Sci. Center at Tucumcari

Year after year, alfalfa hay remains New Mexico's No. 1 cash crop according to the New Mexico Agricultural Statistics Service. Alfalfa also is the legume of choice in irrigated perennial pastures. Whether used as pasture or hay, the value of alfalfa to New Mexico is greatly magnified by its contribution to livestock production and receipts from the sale of meat, milk, and other products generated by livestock enterprises. Stand persistence, a key to profitable alfalfa production, is the ability of individual plants to survive field conditions over time and extends the time during which establishment costs can be recovered.

Harvest management at the beginning and end of each growing season is critical to maintaining alfalfa stands for longer periods. For FD 1 to 6 alfalfa varieties, a 6- to 7-week rest period before a dormancy-inducing freeze (27°F) or between the last two harvests is recommended to allow plants to cold harden as well as to replenish root reserves for winter survival and to initiate spring growth. Non-dormant (FD 7 to 9) varieties also might benefit from this rest period; although, maintaining green leaves throughout winter also at least minimizes the depletion of root energy.

Producers can and should swath and bale (if balable), or graze, any alfalfa that has had 6 weeks since the last fall harvest. If, at any time, freezing temperatures (less than 27°F or less) are forecast and there is enough

standing alfalfa to bale, it should be harvested before the freeze. This will preserve the forage quality even if it gets frozen after it is cut; although it should be baled as soon as it is cured. Frozen alfalfa plants act like they have been cut anyway. Harvesting fall growth will not only give economic return and reduce the incidence of alfalfa weevils in the spring, but also will keep the dead stems from reducing the quality of the first harvest in the next year.

Spring harvest management also has a role in alfalfa stand persistence. Having used proper spring and fall harvest management, if winter and early spring conditions were typical for the region, such that growth progressed without interruption in the spring, taking the first harvest at the bud stage will have minimal impact on stand persistence. If a hard freeze occurs after the alfalfa has begun to grow in spring, however, the alfalfa will need special care to recover and minimize stand loss. If the alfalfa is <6 inches tall and a late freeze occurs not much can be done and not much needs to be done. For taller alfalfa, producers should watch the stem tips. If they are wilted but they stand back up and the alfalfa continues to grow, the growing point was not damaged and nothing needs to be done. If the stem tips remain wilted and turn brown, it is likely that the growing point has died and the stem will also dry out. If this hay can be sold for beef cows or horses, nothing needs to be done. It is wise for alfalfa and other hay growers to have multiple outlets for their product to market hay over a broad range of forage quality. If dairy cows are the target market, the standing forage should be removed as hay, if balable, or grazed or shredded, so that it does not negatively impact forage quality of the first cutting. In any case, the first harvest will probably be delayed. Even if harvest maturity occurs at the same time as in a normal year, harvest should be delayed until the alfalfa reaches 25% bloom to allow full recovery before being cut. Producers also should delay harvest if the field did not get at least 6 weeks of rest the previous fall. Figure 1 shows the rate of depletion of root reserves between the first hard freeze in the fall until alfalfa reaches about 8 to 10 inches tall the next spring. Sufficient root energy is not restocked for rapid regrowth after the first harvest until the alfalfa reaches the bloom stage (Figure 2).

With proper spring and fall harvest management, timing of the remaining cuttings is not as critical for stand maintenance, although, the alfalfa should be allowed to at least reach the bud stage for each cutting. For further information about alfalfa management contact your County Cooperative Extension office or visit the NMSU Cooperative Extension Service publications website (<http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/>).



Figure 1. The depletion of root energy reserves by alfalfa after the last harvest each year.

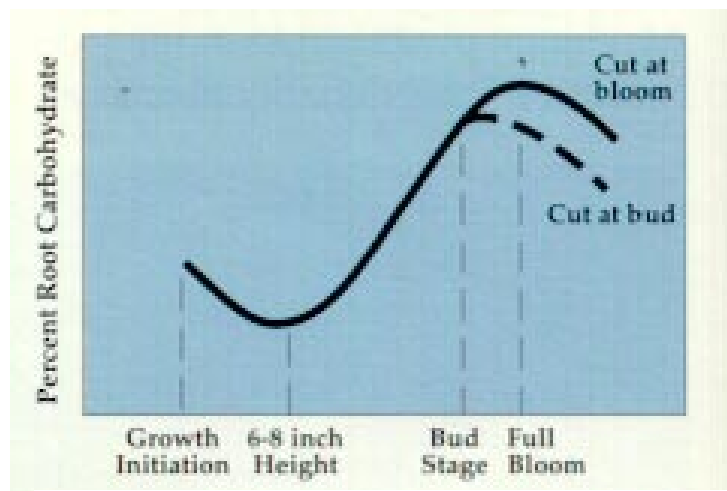


Figure 2. The continued depletion of alfalfa root energy after regrowth followed by the increase to maximum restoration at the bloom stage.