

GREENFEED AS A YEAR-ROUND PROGRAM

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Greenfeeding is a program by which alfalfa is cut, harvested, and delivered to a market all within several hours. This alfalfa is not dehydrated or wilted in any way and it is not usually ensiled but rather, fed directly. There are two pre-requisites for a greenfeed program:

- 1) The necessity of a local market (i.e. dairy or feedlot)
- 2) The availability of a consistent supply of alfalfa.

The procedure for greenfeeding is rather simple, however it does involve quite a bit of specialized, expensive equipment.

First, one must determine when the alfalfa is ready to cut. This is a somewhat subjective determination but we have had our best results when the alfalfa is in the regrowth bud stage. This means the current crop is not yet blooming, however, there are signs of regrowth. One may use the number of days since last cutting as a guide for determining when to cut. Days between cuttings will vary with weather and seasons (35 days plus for early spring and late fall cuttings and as few as 25 days during the summer). One must be careful to never cut, for direct feeding, if there are no signs of regrowth. This can set back the timetable for regrowth as well as causing frothy bloat in the animals that are being fed.

When the alfalfa is ready for harvest one uses conventional forage equipment to cut and chop the product. In our operation the forage harvesters are equipped with taller than normal spouts so that the greenfeed can be loaded into truck mounted feeder boxes. The greenfeed is then weighed and sent to its market where it is fed directly to the animals.

Pricing of greenfeed is done on a dry matter basis and the local hay market is used as a guide. For example, given the local milk cow quality hay price is \$100/ton, the greenfeed is averaging 25% dry matter, and dry hay averages 90% dry matter, the formulas used would be --

$$90 \div 25 = 3.6 \qquad \$100 \div 3.6 = \$27.77$$

Basically, the price of greenfeed would be \$27.70/ton. This pricing formula enables the grower to gross as much per acre greenfeeding as he would in baling.

The advantages of greenfeeding are as follows:

- 1) Less weather-related damage to crop
- 2) Better quality alfalfa feed.
- 3) Less ground traffic.
- 4) More production per acre.

The disadvantages of greenfeed are:

- 1) More caution has to be taken in determining harvest time.
- 2) More caution has to be taken in irrigation so as to allow heavy equipment traffic at harvest time.
- 3) The availability of the proper equipment

In closing, greenfeed done as a year-round program has definite advantages. One must, however, consider very carefully the pre-requisites as well as the disadvantages before embarking on this type of program.