

GET BOTTOM-LINE, PRODUCTION ADVICE DURING FEB. 16-17 ONLINE SYMPOSIUM 2021 *Fae Holin, Communication Specialist, MFA*

Keeping farm production costs to a minimum is essential these days. All the more reason farmers should take advantage of Symposium 2021 talks, presented virtually Feb. 16-17, and hosted by the Midwest Forage Association, Wisconsin Custom Operators, Professional Nutrient Applicators Association of Wisconsin, and University of Wisconsin Extension.

“It has been tough the last couple of years being able to meet the cost of production and keep production costs down,” says Carrie Laboski, University of Wisconsin Extension Soil Scientist, one of the Symposium’s Feb. 16 presenters. She will remind farmers to utilize manure as a nutrient source for alfalfa.

“There is a fair bit of potassium, especially in dairy manure, and that’s a nutrient we commonly need in Wisconsin,” Laboski says. Farmers sometimes hesitate to spend money on potash, but they may be able to meet some or most of their alfalfa crop’s nutrient needs with manure, she adds. Manure also provides sulfur, another nutrient alfalfa can be deficient in, as well as nitrogen, which helps promote grass growth.

As a part of her presentation, Laboski hopes to show farmers the nutrient concentrations and value of manure as well as offer pointers on which types of alfalfa stands will make best use of manure applications.

“Using manure on alfalfa can help growers spread out their manure application windows as opposed to trying to get everything spread in spring and fall,” the soil scientist points out. “With alfalfa you have multiple cuttings, so multiple times during the summer you can potentially be hauling manure and reducing volume from pits.”

If she has time, Laboski will also touch on the benefits of manure on corn. “I do have some work where we apply manure in the spring before corn planting, or at sidedress.”

Midwestern farmers should also consider the benefits – and learn how to meet the challenges – of growing and feeding alfalfa-grass mixes, says Craig Sheaffer, University of Minnesota Forage Agronomist. Sheaffer will tell of the long-known advantages of seeding grasses with alfalfa, which include insurance against winter injury, faster drying rates, and, some years, even greater production yields. “But there are nutritional advantages as well. Grasses tend to have higher fiber and are more digestible than alfalfa. Studies have shown that milk production is actually better with grass in the mix,” he says.

Only about 10% of alfalfa in the Midwest is grown with grasses as compared to the Northeastern U.S., where nearly 90% of alfalfa stands include a percentage of grasses, says Sheaffer quoting work by Jerry Cherney, Cornell University Forage Specialist. “There are various reasons for that, though,” Sheaffer says. “In the Northeast, grasses are able to adapt to the soils ... and they might have quicker dry downs. In the Midwest, we have an herbicide monoculture-based program for growing alfalfa. Also, the composition of grasses grown in the Midwest can change over a season or even within a season. A farmer would need to monitor that composition or quality of that forage in order to balance that ration.”

Sheaffer will also discuss various grasses and criteria farmers can use to choose which mixtures would work best for their operations.

To register for Symposium 2021 and view the agenda, [click here](#). An exhibit hall, and virtual visits with exhibitors, will be available. Attendees will also be able to network virtually with other attendees, take part in the annual Silent Auction, and win prizes. The UW-Extension Manure Applicator Training 101 will be held from 12:45 to 4 p.m. on Feb. 17.

Other topics to be presented include:

- Lessons Learned from Truck Accidents,
- Considering the Cost-Benefit Conundrum for Use of High-Quality Alfalfa Varieties
- Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Manure & Nutrient Management
- Wisconsin DNR Regulation Update
- Conservation Practices to Reduce Nutrient Losses



New Uses in Alfalfa

Manure Technology Producer Round Table

Building Connections Between Livestock & Crop Farmers

Carrying Your Farm on a Hitch Pin

Crop Insurance Options for Alfalfa

Protecting Your Dairy from Price Risk

Manure Pump Maintenance

Is Midwest Weather/Climate Really Changing?

Making Your Manure Credits Count for Alfalfa/Grass/Corn Silage

Seed Genetics, Silage Quality & Economics – Starch, Fiber & TDN

Irrigating Alfalfa: When & Where It Might Pay

Ten Points to Consider When Planning an Agricultural Drainage System

Seeding Success: Practical Considerations for Improving Alfalfa Establishment

How Do We Get to the Bottom of the Alfalfa Autotoxicity Problem?

Factors Influencing Herbicide Persistence, Carryover & Injury Establishing Alfalfa

Let's Talk Fungicides on Alfalfa & Silage Corn

What's New in Mergers