

Fowler Seed Marketing

Serving Your Seed Needs Since 1995!

Hay - Grasses for Mechanical Harvest

Over the past few years, a mixed hay sample, containing **STF-43 soft-leafed, endophyte-free tall fescue**, has been entered in the World Dairy Expo hay contest. These samples had RFQ values over 200 and were consistently in the top 10% compared with over 200 straight alfalfa samples! To harvest high quality grass forage like this, remember the following points: 1) harvest timing is critical when it comes to maximizing yield and quality; 2) select grass varieties that mature in your normal harvest window and with your alfalfa to give you the best opportunity to harvest high quality forage; 3) choose grass species that do well in the fertility and drainage conditions on your farm; 4) plant only varieties selected specifically for forage (leaf) production.

It should be noted that managing grasses for hay is different than managing alfalfa! The growth calendar for cool season grasses starts in late summer. During late summer, tiller buds are set. Stress during that time such as close cutting or excessive fertilization on dry soils, can reduce future yields. However, some of the highest quality grass hay can be harvested in mid to late fall, after buds are set and root reserves built up. Perennial cool season grasses produce most of their yield in late spring and early summer. Once these grasses produce a seed head, they are very likely to go through a period of dormancy, unless moisture and fertility stress are minimized. Supplying grasses with a balanced nutrition program like our **Agri-Energy Grass Hay Fertility Program** in the late summer and before harvesting the first cutting encourages plant health and quicker regrowth. Fowler Seed Marketing specializes in recommending the right Barenbrug grass variety for the conditions in your field and supplying cost-effective fertility programs to maximize quality and yield.

As far as grasses for hay production, tall fescue is one of the most widely adapted and highly productive grass species. Unfortunately, many hay buyers aren't aware that not all fescues have stiff, sharp leaves like KY-31. We recommend **STF-43** (a blend of Bariance and Barelite) soft-leafed, endophyte-free tall fescue, which is very productive in dry or wet conditions and matures with most alfalfa varieties.

Many hay producers have traditionally used orchardgrass with their alfalfa. Late maturing varieties like **HLR** and **FSM Brand Snowbelt** are very productive, soft-textured varieties that give a longer harvest window for making quality hay. Both HLR and Snowbelt are late maturing orchardgrasses with season-long high yields, good winter hardiness, and leaf disease resistance; establishing more thickly and quickly than older varieties. **HLR** matures about the fourth week of May and features excellent winter hardiness, outstanding disease resistance and outstanding digestibility and yields.

On wetter soils, either **Barpenta** (late-maturity) or **FSM Brand Promesse** (medium-maturity) timothy produce hay with excellent color, leafiness, and soft-texture that is especially suited to the equine market. **Barpenta** and **Promesse** have greater leafiness than Climax, establish rapidly and demonstrate superior disease resistance. **Barpenta** is a newer release that shows some yield advantage to older varieties in Cornell trials. **Hakari Mountain Brome** is available in limited quantities and is best suited to fertile, well-drained soils. Consult with your local FSM dealer for seed and fertility recommendations that fit your farm and management system.