

Making hay in a day

PHOTO BY HAREN PEISINGER



By **FRAN O'LEARY**

If you play your cards right and fine-tune your hay-making strategies, you can mow and chop hay all in the same day, says Kevin Shinnners, ag engineering professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"The first thing you have to do is let Mother Nature do her work," Shinnners says.

Obviously, it's best to mow

Key Points

- A dry, sunny day offers optimal conditions for haymaking.
- Place crop in as wide a swath as possible.
- Chop hay when it is ready and be ready to work quickly.

hay on a dry, sunny day, preferably in the morning after the dew is off so the crop has all day to dry.

"If drying conditions are poor, you're never going to make haylage in a day no matter what you do mechanically," he notes. Shinnners says it's important to lay out the swath of hay as wide as possible.

"The wider we lay the crop out, the more sun it will get."

While large, single-platform mower-conditioners or windrowers provide the most productivity, they don't always let you lay out the windrow as

wide as you'd like. "With an 18-foot-wide mower, the best you can probably do is an 8-foot swath," he says. "That's less than 50% of the cut width."

If you have a wide platform, Shinnners suggests one way to make a wide swath is to ted the hay, but he admits a lot of producers don't want to add that step because of worries about leaf loss and extra cost.

Another alternative he offers is switching from a large, single

BETTER HAY: Growers should consider cutting hay in wide swaths. According to a recent New York study, wider swaths improve the quality of the forage.

platform, such as an 18-foot mower, and putting two 10-foot mowers on your tractor — one that mounts on the front and one that pulls behind.

"Now you've gone from an 18-foot mower that lets you lay the hay out less than 50% to two 10-foot mowers that let you lay a swath up to 80% of the cut width," Shinnners says.

Condition correctly

The other area where you want to do a good job is in conditioning the crop.

"Conditioned hay will dry fast," he says. "So make sure the roll gap is set correctly."

That's about all that can be done mechanically. The rest is up to you and Mother Nature.

"Hopefully, you can begin chopping late in the afternoon, but that all depends on if the ground is wet underneath the windrows and weather drying conditions are favorable."

If you are working hard to improve your drying rate, you'd better be ready to chop quickly because the hay is going to continue drying down after you start chopping.

"You have to have your wagons and your chopper ready so that you can get going as soon as it's ready," Shinnners says. "There's no magic switch to switch off as soon as the hay is ready; it will just keep drying, and it's important to be ready to go when the hay is."

Farm Progress hayexpo 2007

June 20-21 • Westgate, Iowa

By **ROD SWOBODA**

If you are interested in hay and forage crops, plan to attend the 2007 Farm Progress Hay Expo June 20-21 near the town of Westgate, Iowa. It's the Midwest's largest two-day hay event.

This is the Hay Expo's 21st year of bringing growers together with companies specializing in hay and forage machinery, seed and related crops, livestock products, and information.

"The expo gives alfalfa and other hay and forage producers a one-stop learning and shopping opportunity focused on the latest equipment and techniques," says Dena Jensen, marketing specialist for Farm Progress Companies, event sponsor.

The host farm for the 2007 show is Top-Deck Holsteins, owned by Roger and Judy

Decker and their sons, Jason, Derek and Justin. The Deckers farm 1,750 acres, milk 650 dairy cows, and raise 700 heifers and dry cows.

The Deckers manage their 350 acres of alfalfa to maximize milk production. "We shoot for the best relative feed value we can get," says Roger. "Timely cutting and harvesting are two key factors."



YOU'RE INVITED: The Decker family — Justin, Judy, Jason, Roger and Derek — are hosting the 2007 Farm Progress Hay Expo at their northeast Iowa dairy farm.

The Decker dairy facility has an unusual feature: Manure from the cows is run through a methane digester. Methane from the manure is used to power a generator, which produces electricity for Alliant Energy. The manure coming out of the digester goes through a separator system to produce a dried manure byproduct, which is recycled and used as cattle bedding.

Make energy from manure

The methane digester and manure separation equipment are located on the farmstead adjacent to the hay show activities. Tours of the digester and separator facility will occur from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. each day.

A tram will haul people from the Hay Expo site to the facility near the dairy barns. A representative of Alliant Energy and a Decker family member will be available to explain the system.

At this year's Hay Expo, more than 200 acres of prime alfalfa will be used for field demonstrations that include mowing, conditioning, bagging, raking, baling and hay handling. A 10-acre exhibit field will showcase the latest technology.

"The Hay Expo provides the opportunity for you to observe and evaluate what's new," says Jensen. Producers can talk to company people and others about seed, hay marketing, crop protection, production, conservation, etc. Educational exhibits include those by Iowa State University Extension, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Iowa Forage and Grassland Council, and other agencies.

Exhibit hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; admission is free, and parking is \$5 per vehicle. The show site is just west of Westgate on County Road C33 in Fayette County. Westgate is 38 miles northeast of Waterloo.

A current list of exhibitors is posted at www.hayexpo.com and is updated frequently.

How to get to the expo

THE show site is on County Road C33 in Fayette County, Iowa, about 12 miles northwest of Oelwein and 1.5 miles west of Westgate.

■ **From southeast or southwest:** Take Highway 3 to W13, and turn north. Take W13 to C33 and turn west. Drive two miles to V Avenue, and turn south. Follow signs to the show site, located on the east (left).

■ **From northeast:** Take Hwy. 150 south to C33 west, and then C33 to V Avenue. Turn south onto V Avenue, and follow signs to the show site, located on the east (left).

■ **From northwest:** Take Highway 63 north to C33. Turn east onto C33, and then turn south onto V Avenue. Follow signs to the show site, located on the east (left).

Call 866-264-7469 for more information.