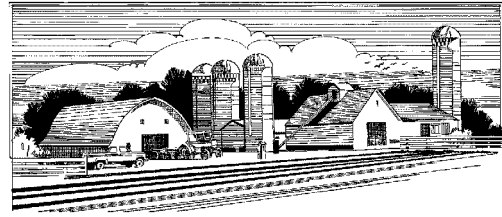


# Ag Links

Polk County UW-Extension Office 715-485-8600  
<http://polk.uwex.edu>



May 2008

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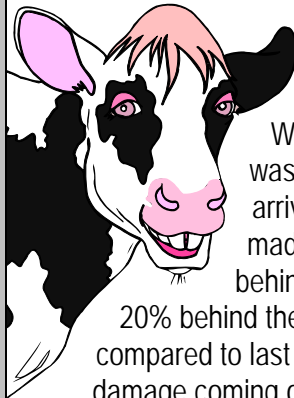
*Time First Cutting Hay*

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*Custom Rate Guide and Cropland Rent Surveys Updated*

This information is provided to you through cooperative efforts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, UW-Extension and Polk County. For more information, contact the Polk County UW-Extension Office at 485-8600.

Ryan Sterry  
Agriculture/Horticulture Agent



## Greetings

Warmer weather is here, even though there was beginning to be a few doubts if it would arrive or not. A lot of planting progress has been made the last couple weeks, although we're still behind. Corn planting and emergence is about 20% behind the 5 year average, and over 35% behind compared to last year. Also, many alfalfa fields took some damage coming out of the winter. It is estimated 30% of the fields in the Northwest corner of the state have moderate to severe damage, with the majority occurring in Polk and St. Croix Counties. Some fields with only strips and knolls damaged were saved, though, and had clover or grass inter-seeded in. Otherwise, the hay crop is progressing slowly, with all reports I've seen having alfalfa still in the vegetative stage.

The shortage of hay some farmers are having brings back the quality vs. quantity debate for when to harvest. The best recommendation is to harvest at the quality you need. For beef and heifers, this means it's O.K. to wait a little bit longer to gain tonnage. Wait too long, though, and you may actually be harvesting fewer nutrients in over mature hay than you would have if harvested at the right quality because mature hay can degrade in quality quite rapidly.

Otherwise, I hope to get a chance to talk to you at one of the upcoming events this summer. Find out what's happening in this newsletter.

Best regards

Ryan Sterry

## What's Your Grazing Plan?

It's estimated that up to 80% of the Midwest's pastures are in poor condition due to weed infestations, erosion, uneven fertility, and continuous/over grazing. Having a plan for managed grazing can increase forage tonnage and quality, putting more profit into your pastures. A grazing plan means having an idea of how much forage you'll need given current livestock numbers, forage quality needs for growth or lactation, and then calculating the paddock size and rotation needed to achieve those goals.



progress towards your goals. If not, what are your barriers to success? Implementing a managed grazing plan doesn't occur overnight, in fact of the 54 plans written in the last two years over half are partially implemented "works in progress," taking two, and sometimes more, years to fully implement. Checking your progress annually will let you know if you are on track.

For those of you that are already using managed grazing, Grazing Planner Dean Retzlaff recommends reviewing your plan annually to update changes in pastures and herd composition. Part of this review should be asking yourself if you are making

For additional information on writing or updating grazing plans contact Dean Retzlaff, Grazing Planner at 259-3415. Another great resource is teaming up with an experienced grazer through the NW WI Graziers Network mentor program. For more info. contact Lynn Johnson, Grazing Intern and seasoned grazing veteran, at 268-8778.

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## UW-Research Update: What's the Best Time to AI?

There are many different programs out there to synchronize cattle for timed AI. Part of the struggle of implementing and managing a breeding program is finding the right balance biologically (works for the cow) and labor to handle cows (works for the farmer). For farms using Ovsynch to synchronize timed AI, one labor saving option is to AI cows at the same time as the final GnRH injection, known as Cosynch, instead of AI 16 hours later as originally designed. For some time now producers have debated if the labor savings of Cosynch was worth any loss in conception rate compared to traditional Ovsynch. Recent research shows that the difference in conception rates is greater than we first thought, and that the labor savings of Cosynch is really an illusion.

Denise Brusveen, working with Professor Milo Wiltbank, compared two Cosynch programs; one with GnRH + AI 48 hours after the Prostaglandin injection of Ovsynch and one with GnRH + AI 72 hours later. A third program compared was Ovsynch, modified to fit a 3X milking schedule, in which cows received the final GnRH at 56 hours after PGF with AI 16 hours later

(Ovsynch-56). The results were overwhelmingly in favor of Ovsynch-56. Cows receiving Ovsynch-56 had a conception rate of 38.6% compared to 29.2% for Cosynch-48 and 25.4% for Cosynch-72 for all services combined.

Even though Cosynch had a poorer conception rate, some would argue the labor saving is worth it, right? Well, this is only partially true. For first and second AI's the number of animal handling times (number open cows X number of injections and AI) is indeed less for Cosynch. But, after the 2<sup>nd</sup> AI the advantage goes to Ovsynch-56. With each additional breeding the amount of labor evens out between Cosynch and Ovsynch. Plus, there is the cost benefit of fewer injections, less semen, and fewer cows open late in lactation to consider.

## UW-Extension hosts grazing schools across Wisconsin

Farmers interested in switching to rotational grazing or just starting out in grazing should plan to attend one of the Wisconsin Grazing Schools which will be held around the state over the next several months.

The Wisconsin Grazing Schools are designed to teach producers, educators and agency staff the basics of management-intensive grazing with a hands-on approach.

The two-day workshops will provide opportunities for in-depth discussions and field exercises covering both agronomic and livestock topics related to grazing and dairy and livestock production on pastures. Topics include pasture species selection and management, fencing and watering systems, animal health on pasture, animal nutrition, pasture improvement techniques and economics of pasturing systems. Producers will have the opportunity to network with producers already using Management intensive grazing (MIG) as well as University and USDA-NRCS experts in grazing.

Management Intensive Grazing (MIG) is based on four key factors:

-- meeting the nutrient requirements of the grazing animal;

-- optimizing forage yield, quality, and persistence;  
-- environmental stewardship; and  
-- integrating knowledge and technology into a practical and profitable management system.

Cost for the school is \$75 per person, which includes reference materials and meals during the school. A second person from the same farm can register for \$35. Dates, locations and registration deadlines are:

- June 10-11 in River Falls. Registration deadline--June 2.
- June 24-25 in Gleason. Registration deadline – June 16.
- July 22 in Fond du Lac. Registration deadline – July 14. Please note the Fond du Lac school is one day only and registration is \$35.
- Aug. 19-20 in Richland Center. Registration date to be announced.

For a brochure and registration information, contact Dennis Cosgrove, UW-River Falls, 410 S. Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022 (715) 425-3345 or by email at [dennis.r.cosgrove@uwrf.edu](mailto:dennis.r.cosgrove@uwrf.edu). The brochure can also be downloaded from [www.uwrf.edu/grazing](http://www.uwrf.edu/grazing) under upcoming events.



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I will be participating/hosting the following meetings and hope to see you this summer!

**June 18, 1-3 p.m., Dairy Sheep Pasture Walk, Grantsburg**  
Love Tree Farm, Mary & David Falk, 12413 County Z

**June 19, 10:30-12:30, St. Croix County Low Cost Milking Parlor Tour**  
Croes Udder Dairy and Bob & Nancy Johnson. Details inside.

**July 10, 1-3 p.m., Dairy Pasture Walk, Frederic**  
Darold Nelson, 1021 270th Avenue

### Meeting Dates

**July 15-17, Farm Technology Days, Country Aire Dairy, Brown County**

**August 23<sup>rd</sup>, Spooner Sheep Day, UW Ag Research Station, Spooner**

**September 26-27, Ag and Household Chemical Clean Sweep**  
Recycling Center, St. Croix Falls. Call 483-1088 or 485-9294 for more info.

## How much can I pay for standing hay?

Of the many questions our office receives each year, calculating the value of standing hay used to be one of the more predictable to answer, mainly for two reasons: 1) I knew it was coming, and 2) the answers were straightforward and easy to walk through. Did you notice I said used to be? Here's a list of reasons that make answering this question more complicated than in the past.

- 1) The baseline value has increased because fuel and fertilizer prices have increased to establish stands.
- 2) Reason #1 also applies to competing feeds, thus there may not be a cheaper alternative.
- 3) Value of bare cropland has increased (either to own or rent). Either the value of standing hay has to rise accordingly, or those fields will be converted to row crops.
- 4) Potassium (K) fertilizer prices have skyrocketed. On average 55 lbs of K are removed for every dry matter ton forage, and the average county yield is 3 tons. Using \$0.31/lb potash results in a nutrient removal value of \$85.25.

So, how do we answer this question now? From the seller's perspective the alfalfa field must, at minimum, get a bare land price plus the cost of alfalfa establishment prorated over four years, plus the value

of nutrients removed by the alfalfa crop. With most other crops I would say if these minimums can't be met there is more value in just renting bare land without the established alfalfa crop. That isn't completely true with alfalfa because there is a rotation "bump" from growing a perennial crop, plus the nitrogen credits and conservation plan considerations to keep in mind.



From the buyer's perspective, the out of pocket costs are harvesting and K. There is also a cost associated with assuming the unknown weather risk. On average, it costs between \$30 to \$40 to harvest a ton of dry matter. Potassium removal will be about \$25-30 per ton. That adds up to \$55-70 per dry matter ton. With that value comes some weather risk of getting a quality crop harvested. If the owner has decided to charge \$125/acre plus fertilizer (which we already accounted for), our total investment for a three ton per acre yield is about \$110 per dry matter ton (\$125 per acre divided by 3 tons plus \$70 for harvesting and fertilizer).

One thing that hasn't changed is that the process is more important than the actual numbers, as cash rent values, harvest costs, and fertilizer values will vary with each situation. Renting standing alfalfa may still be a good deal, but it's no easy question anymore.

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## Timing First Cutting Hay – Scissors Clip Program

This spring the Polk County UW-Extension office is monitoring the rate at which area alfalfa hay fields are maturing to help time first cutting using the scissors clip/PEAQ program. Results will be updated twice weekly on our web site. To sign up to have results faxed or emailed to you call our office at 485-8600.

Timing of first cutting alfalfa hay is critical, since about 40% of the seasons forage comes from first cut. Moreover, producers have the difficult task of balancing quality and yield, plus the weather. Using scissors clip/PEAQ (Predictive Equations of Alfalfa

Quality) results can help producers monitor changes in quality. Keep the following in mind when scheduling first cutting.

- 1) Match forage quality to animal needs. Alfalfa/grass forage should be 150 RFO for lactating dairy cows, and 120-130 for heifers, stockers, and lactating beef cows.
- 2) Adjust for field loss. Under the best of conditions assume 15% point loss of quality in the field. That means fields should be cut at 165-170 RFO to get 150 RFO feed in the bale or silo.

## Timing First Cutting Hay, continued.....

- 3) Make adjustments for total harvest time. Alfalfa will lose 3-5 RFQ points per day, so the start of harvest should be adjusted so hay can average an RFQ of 150 over the harvest period. This means haying should be 50% completed by the time RFQ reaches 170 for the milking herd (see #2).
- 4) Finally, adjust for local field conditions. With the cool weather this year here are a few things to keep in mind
  - We may see grasses mature faster relative to alfalfa. Grass maturity is based more on day length than temperature compared to alfalfa.
  - Frost damage occurs to alfalfa and clover when air temp is 24-26 degrees for 4+ hours. If frozen, tips will wilt in a day or two and then gradually turn brown. Further growth of the stand will cease, so harvesting is recommended.
  - Grasses will suffer frost damage in the same temperature range however yield response will be minimal. The leaf tips, if frosted will gradually turn brown but, since the growing point is at the leaf base near the stem, future growth will not cease unless the entire leaf is frozen

Date		Location		
		Lincoln	Balsam Lake	West Sweden
May 27	Maturity RFQ (PEAQ)	Veg 231	Veg 231	Veg 225

## Cost of Raising Dairy Heifers

Raising dairy heifers is truly an investment in the future, the genetics, health, and growth of today's calf and will significantly affect your herd's performance down the road. Rearing heifers can be expensive; in fact it's the second highest cost behind feed on the dairy. Last summer UW-Extension Ag Agents gathered data from 49 farms on their heifer raising costs. The average cost to raise a heifer from birth to freshening on these farms was \$2,149. This is a significant expense, and unlike production traits, there is little genetic progress to fall back on for improvement. This means inflation can quickly increase heifer rearing costs if it's not kept in check by management.

The purpose of this project isn't to tell you what it's supposed to cost you to raise a heifer, or a custom grower what to charge. What this data does do is provide a way for farms to benchmark their data against comparable Wisconsin farms and shed some light on possible areas for improvement. Operations were broken down into three categories: Tie stall operators (15), Free stall operators (21), and Custom heifer growers (13). Rearing costs were divided between calves and heifers. For purposes of this project a calf became a heifer when moved to group housing. To standardize data across farms, dollar values for labor, feed, and buildings were standardized. If unpaid family labor was used an

opportunity cost was assigned to it. Also, the value of a newborn calf was fixed at \$500.

For the calf enterprise labor was the biggest expense, 47% of total, followed by feed (34%), variable (15%), and fixed costs (4%). The cost pattern was similar for most farms, except that custom growers were about twice as labor efficient than tie and free stall farms. Taking a closer look at labor, the average farm took care of 7.9 calves/hour. The least efficient farm cared for only 2.3 calves/hour, and the most efficient 26.8 calves/hour. Daily cost to raise wet calves (excluding the \$500 calf value) was \$5.78 for tie stall herds, \$5.59 for free stall and \$3.16 for custom operators.

The heifer enterprise was a different story. There feed costs accounted for 52% of the expense, followed by labor and variable costs tied at 18%, and fixed costs at 12%. Free stall farms didn't follow this pattern exactly, being slightly lower in labor cost but higher in variable costs than their counterparts. Daily cost to raise heifers, again excluding the \$500 calf value, was \$2.12 for tie stall herds, \$2.04 for free stall herds, and \$1.93 for custom operators.

This is only a summary of the data. More information on cost assumptions, cost breakdowns based on age, and most and lease efficient farms can be found in the full report on our website <http://polk.uwex.edu/ag/>

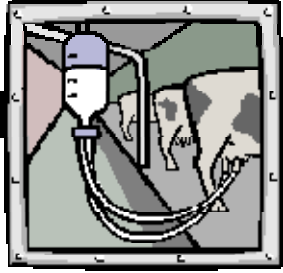
## Custom Rate Guide and Cropland Rent Surveys Updated

This winter local farmers, custom operators, and non-operating landlords were surveyed to update two popular reports; the Wisconsin Custom Rate Guide and the Polk County Cropland Rent Survey. Both of these reports utilize producer input to help answer common questions such as "what is the going rate for renting cropland?" or "how do I decide what to charge my neighbor for no-till planting her corn?" Producers should note that these reports make no effort to judge fairness of rates, but serve as a summary of averages and ranges as a starting point for negotiations.

Over 750 reports were compiled for the Custom Rate Guide. Items on the survey included Tillage Operations, Planting, Forage and Grain Harvesting, Machinery Rental, and more. Depending on the number of responses for a category, the results were broken down into three state regions, or nine districts.

The Polk County Cropland Rent Survey was sent to 200 active producers and non-operating landlords. Responses were received from 61 respondents on 137 parcels of land. Both of these reports can be found on our website at: <http://polk.uwex.edu/ag/>

<b>Cash Rent Survey of Cropland By Town Polk County 2007</b>			
<b>District</b>	<b># of Parcels</b>	<b>Avg. Rent/Acre</b>	<b>Range in Rental Rate - \$/Acre</b>
<b>Northwest District:</b> St. Croix Falls, Eureka, Laketown, Sterling	<b>21</b>	<b>\$38.00</b>	<b>\$20-\$60</b>
<b>Northeast District:</b> Bone Lake, Clam Falls, Lorain, Georgetown, Johnstown, McKinley, Luck, West Sweden	<b>19</b>	<b>\$34.00</b>	<b>\$15 - \$50</b>
<b>Central District:</b> Apple River, Balsam Lake Beaver, Milltown	<b>25</b>	<b>\$38.00</b>	<b>\$5 - \$50</b>
<b>Southeast District:</b> Lincoln, Black Brook, Clayton, Clear Lake	<b>21</b>	<b>\$50.00</b>	<b>\$40 - \$72</b>
<b>Southwest District:</b> Alden, Farmington, Garfield, Osceola	<b>51</b>	<b>\$52.00</b>	<b>\$35 - \$120</b>



## Pierce/St. Croix UW-Extension Low Cost Dairy Parlor Tour

10:30am-12:30 pm  
Thursday, June 19, 2008

### Hosts:

Croes UdderDairy - Jerry, Char & Jeff Croes, 1950 200th Ave., Deer Park  
*Directions: From the North take HWY 46 to Cty Rd H, heading West. Take 200<sup>th</sup> St. South to 200<sup>th</sup> Ave. and head West.*

Bob & Nancy Johnson, 1963 110th Ave., Baldwin  
*Directions: Take HWY 63 to 110<sup>th</sup> Ave and head West.*

### **Croes Udder Dairy 10:30am**

Currently Milking 100 Cows  
Built a 94Cow 4 Row Freestall Barn  
/Holding Area/Parlor in 2004-05  
Installed a Home Built Dbl 8 Parlor  
Sand Bedded Freestalls  
Manure is Daily Hauled  
Feed Storage- Silo Bags

### **Johnson Farm 11:30am**

Currently Milking 170 Cows  
Built 154 Cow 3 Row Freestall Barn in  
'06  
Installed Used Dbl 6 Expanded to Dbl 8  
and Holding Area Inside 2-Story  
Barn  
in 2007  
Freestalls-Cow Mats with Sawdust  
Bedding  
Alley Scrapers  
Manure Storage-Earthen Lagoon  
Feed Storage-Upright Silos and Silo  
Bags

Attendees may visit one or both sites. The Croes' and Johnson's will make comments about their set ups during the tour. Refreshments provided at each site by Bremer Bank, Amery and AgStar, Baldwin. For more information contact Lee Milligan, St. Croix County UWEX, at 684-3301, extension 5.