



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Hardin County Extension News Release

For Further Information Contact:

Mark Badertscher

Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Educator

Phone – 419-674-2297

E-Mail – badertscher.4@osu.edu

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Did You Miss That Hay-Making Window?

Hardin County – Hats off to those who got their first cutting made during the nice weather earlier, but some of us missed it! There has been rain in the forecast about every three days and very wet soils from the heavy rains this past weekend across much of Ohio. While we are eager to get that first cutting made, haste will make waste if we drive on hay stands before the soils are firm enough to support the equipment.

When we run hay equipment on soft soils, the wheel compaction damage to plant crowns will be like a plague for the remaining life of the stand. It will lead to lower forage yield, weed invasion, and frustrating attempts to “fill-in” the damaged stand, and ultimately a premature termination of the stand.

The crop is indeed maturing and losing quality. Our grasses are heading out and leaf diseases will begin to take their toll. Livestock need to be fed. While we do need to cut as soon as we can, getting on the soils before they are firm enough will only lead to bigger problems in the long run. This is particularly true for legumes.

Now that the soils are starting to firm up, start harvesting grass stands first where possible. Not only will they be hurt less than legumes when soils are softer, their quality is dropping quickly. But be reasonable about this, because grasses will also be damaged permanently if the soil is too soft.

Keep in mind that while the waiting for better weather is frustrating now, wheel traffic damage turns into an on-going frustration that is never overcome by the damaged stand. The additional loss in forage quality while waiting for soils to dry is the lesser of two evils.

Article written by Dr. Mark Sulc, OSU Extension Forage Specialist, and edited by Mark Badertscher, OSU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator-Hardin County.