

David Hallauer  
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

### ***Post-Harvest Hay Field Evaluations***

Harvest for hay may be a greater stress on our forage stands than we'd like to give it credit for. We know from grazing studies if we remove 80 percent of a plant's leaf area, we stop root growth for as long as 12 days. Haying often does that – and maybe more.

Now is a good time to return to previously harvested stands for a follow up look as to how they are responding. With any luck, recent moisture events and cooler temperatures have helped the recovery process. As you walk across stands, make a mental note of areas where regrowth is occurring – and where it is not. Soil type differences are a major factor affecting grass recovery and regrowth levels highlights those differences rather vividly. Ground truth soil type differences by taking soil cores across the field to compare soil depth and moisture.

It's also a good time to check post-harvest weed pressure. It's not uncommon to get a few ironweed scattered across a field and often a few broadleaf weeds won't do much harm. If those weeds are hemp dogbane or sericea, however, a post-harvest or late summer treatment plan may be of value. Keep an eye on the grasses you are seeing as well. Just because it's green doesn't mean it's our desired cool season grass. Summer annual grasses (foxtail, etc...) have increased in many stands, and while there may not be enough to worry about, they can take up valuable moisture cool season grasses will need to recover. Sedges have increased in many stands as well. Monitor invasive grass like weeds now so they don't become larger issues later.

Last but not least, monitor for insect feeding. Fall armyworm moths are likely present in the southern reaches of the state, and while our trapping network here in NEK (four sites in two counties across the District) has yet to yield evidence of moth flights, it's good to look for feeding. Most stands can tolerate a little feeding, but stressed stands in particular can be heavily damaged when feeding is heavy.

There are a lot of factors that will affect next year's hay crop – and some of them are influencing that stand already. Evaluations now can help us better manage some of those influences for the positive, while giving us a head start on management for next year as well.