

# 2011 Alfalfa Grazing Tolerance Report

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## Introduction

Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) is the highest yielding, highest quality forage legume grown in Kentucky. It forms the basis of Kentucky's cash hay enterprise and is an important component in dairy, horse, beef, and sheep diets. Recent emphasis on its use as a grazing crop and the release of grazing-tolerant varieties have raised the following question: Do varieties differ in tolerance to grazing? We have chosen to use the standard tolerance test recommended by the North American Alfalfa Improvement Conference. This test uses continuous heavy grazing to sort out differences in grazing tolerance in a relatively short period of time.

This report summarizes current research on the grazing tolerance of alfalfa varieties when subjected to continuous heavy grazing pressure during the grazing season. Table 6 shows a summary of all alfalfa varieties tested in Kentucky during the last 15 years. The UK Forage Extension web site at [www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage](http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage) contains electronic versions of all forage variety testing reports from Kentucky and surrounding states and from a large number of other forage publications.

## Description of the Tests

Alfalfa variety tests for grazing tolerance were established in Lexington in the fall of 2008, 2009, and 2010. The soils at this location are well-drained silt loams and are well suited to alfalfa. Plots were 5 by 20 feet in a randomized complete block design, with each variety replicated six times. In each test, 20 lb/A of seed were planted into a prepared seedbed using a disk drill. All seed lots were treated with metalaxyl fungicide and inoculated if not supplied with these treatments. Plots were grazed continuously beginning the first spring after seeding. Grazing

pressure was maintained to keep plant height to less than 3 inches. In general, plots were grazed from April until mid-September. Supplemental hay was fed during periods of slowest growth. Visual ratings of percent stand were made in the fall several weeks after the cattle were removed to check stand survival after the grazing season. Ratings were made in the spring prior to grazing to check on winter survival and spring growth. Since trials were seeded in rows, persistence ratings were based on density within a row and not total ground cover. Pests (weeds and insects) were controlled so they would not limit yield or persistence. Fertilizers (lime, P, K, and Boron) were applied as needed. In each trial, Alfagraze was the grazing-tolerant check variety, and either Apollo or 5432 was the grazing-intolerant check variety.

## Results and Discussion

Weather data for Lexington for 2009, 2010, and 2011 are presented in Table 1.

Data on percent stand are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4. Statistical analyses were performed on all alfalfa yield data (including experimentals) to determine

if the apparent differences are truly due to variety or just due to chance. Varieties not significantly different from the highest numerical value in a column are marked with one asterisk (\*). To determine if two varieties are truly different, compare the difference between the two varieties to the Least Significant Difference (LSD) at the bottom of the column. If the difference is equal to or greater than the LSD, the varieties are truly different when grown under the conditions at a given location. The Coefficient of Variation (CV), which is a measure of the variability of the data, is included for each column of means. Low variability is desirable, and increased variability within a study results in higher CVs and larger LSDs.

Apollo and 5432 have been used widely in trials as the grazing-intolerant varieties. Therefore, the response of these varieties provides a useful measure of the severity of the grazing pressure applied to the plots. In general, types developed for tolerance to grazing tolerated heavy grazing pressure better than hay types. Table 5 summarizes information about distributors, fall dormancy ratings, disease resistance information and persistence

**Table 1. Temperature and rainfall at Lexington, Kentucky in 2009, 2010 and 2011.**

	2009				2010				2011 <sup>2</sup>			
	Temp.		Rainfall		Temp.		Rainfall		Temp.		Rainfall	
	°F	DEP <sup>1</sup>	IN	DEP	°F	DEP	IN	DEP	°F	DEP	IN	DEP
JAN	28	-3	2.45	-0.41	29	-2	2.40	-0.46	29	-2	2.10	-0.76
FEB	38	+3	2.86	-0.35	29	-6	1.38	-1.83	39	+4	6.34	+3.13
MAR	48	+4	2.19	-2.21	47	+3	1.05	-3.35	47	+3	4.76	+0.36
APR	55	0	4.48	+0.60	59	+4	2.74	-1.14	58	+3	12.36	+8.48
MAY	64	0	5.05	+0.58	67	+3	7.84	+3.37	64	0	6.72	+2.25
JUN	74	+2	5.41	-1.75	76	+4	4.61	+0.95	74	+2	2.61	-1.05
JUL	71	-5	5.89	+0.89	78	+2	5.49	+0.49	80	+4	6.29	1.29
AUG	73	-2	5.38	+1.45	78	+3	1.54	-2.39	75	0	2.89	-1.04
SEP	68	0	5.37	+2.17	71	+3	1.14	-2.06	66	-2	5.52	+2.32
OCT	54	-3	4.83	+2.26	59	+2	1.22	-1.35	55	-2	4.10	+1.53
NOV	49	+4	0.94	-2.45	47	+2	4.58	+1.19				
DEC	36	0	3.86	-0.12	28	-8	2.15	-1.93				
Total			48.71	+4.16			36.14	-8.41			53.69	+16.51

<sup>1</sup> DEP is departure from the long-term average.  
<sup>2</sup> 2011 data is for the ten months through October

**Table 2. Seedling vigor and stand persistence of alfalfa varieties sown September 10, 2008 in a cattle grazing tolerance study at Lexington, Kentucky.**

Variety	Seedling Vigor <sup>1</sup> Oct 13, 2008	Percent Stand							
		2008		2009		2010		2011	
		Oct 13	Apr 8	Oct 12	Apr 6	Nov 22	Apr 14	Nov 7	
<b>Commercial Varieties-Available for Farm Use</b>									
Alfagraze	4.2	100	100	93	84	19	17	4	
Ameristand 403T	4.0	100	100	95	92	18	15	3	
LegenDairy 5.0	4.7	100	100	93	89	13	10	3	
Apollo	4.5	100	100	91	85	13	9	2	
Spredor 4	4.5	100	100	93	88	13	9	1	
<b>Experimental Varieties</b>									
GA-MPX	4.2	100	100	95	85	30	28	10*	
Mean	4.3	100.0	100.0	93.4	87.2	17.6	14.5	3.9	
CV,%	14.3	0.0	0.0	2.7	7.0	57.9	66.0	89.3	
LSD,0.05	0.7	0.0	0.0	3.0	7.2	12.1	11.4	4.1	

<sup>1</sup> Vigor score based on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the most vigorous seedling growth.  
\* Not significantly different from the highest numerical value in the column, based on the 0.05 LSD.

**Table 4. Stand persistence of alfalfa varieties sown September 1, 2010 in a cattle grazing tolerance study at Lexington, Kentucky.**

Variety	Percent Stand		
	2010	2011	
	Oct 14	Mar 15	Nov 7
<b>Commercial Varieties-Available for Farm Use</b>			
Ameristand 403T	100	99	45*
Alfagraze	99	99	44*
A4535	100	100	43*
TS4007	99	98	39*
Apollo	99	99	37*
PGI424	97	96	37*
Mean	99.1	98.5	40.7
CV,%	1.1	1.6	26.0
LSD,0.05	1.3	1.8	12.6

\* Not significantly different from the highest numerical value in the column, based on the 0.05 LSD.

across years for all varieties included in these tests.

Table 6 is a summary of stand persistence data from 1994 to 2011 of commercial varieties that have been entered in the Kentucky trials. The data for each specific trial are listed as a percentage of the grazing-tolerant variety Alfagraze. In other words, in each trial Alfagraze is 100 percent—varieties with percentages over 100 persisted better than Alfagraze and varieties with percentages less than 100 persisted less than Alfagraze. Direct, statistical comparisons of varieties cannot be made using the summary Table 6, but these comparisons do help to identify va-

**Table 3. Seedling vigor and stand persistence of alfalfa varieties sown September 3, 2009 in a cattle grazing tolerance study at Lexington, Kentucky.**

Variety	Seedling Vigor <sup>1</sup> Oct 12, 2009	Percent Stand					
		2009		2010		2011	
		Oct 12	Apr 7	Nov <sup>2</sup>	Apr 14	Nov 7	
<b>Commercial Varieties-Available for Farm Use</b>							
Alfagraze	3.9	96	97	–	53	24*	
Ameristand 403TPlus	4.7	99	100	–	49	23*	
Ameristand 407TQ	4.9	100	99	–	32	18*	
Apollo	4.2	100	99	–	35	17*	
Archer III	4.7	100	100	–	26	14*	
PGI 459	4.8	100	100	–	26	12*	
<b>Experimental Varieties</b>							
TS4010/A4535	4.8	100	99	–	38	20*	
Mean	4.6	99.2	99.2	–	36.9	18.2	
CV,%	8.0	2.2	1.8	–	49.4	62.7	
LSD,0.05	0.4	2.5	2.1	–	21.5	13.5	

<sup>1</sup> Vigor score based on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the most vigorous seedling growth.  
<sup>2</sup> Due to very dry weather there was not enough growth after the cattle were removed to obtain a valid stand rating.  
\* Not significantly different from the highest numerical value in the column, based on the 0.05 LSD.

rieties for further consideration. Varieties that have performed better than average over many years and at several locations have very stable performance, while others may have performed very well in wet years or on particular soil types. These details may influence variety choice, and the information can be found in the yearly reports. See footnote in Table 6 to determine which yearly report to refer to.

## Summary

Measurements taken after multiple years of grazing in these trials indicate that alfalfa varieties have been developed that exhibit improved tolerance to heavy continuous grazing pressure compared to standard hay-type varieties. The grazing management imposed in these trials included continuous stocking from the initiation of grazing in spring until mid-September, when grazing was terminated for the season to allow stands to acclimate to winter. Heavy grazing pressure was used purposely in these trials to better differentiate among varieties for relative grazing tolerance. Research has shown that abusive grazing tests are a good way to sort out differences in grazing tolerance between varieties in a relatively short period of time. Recommended rotational grazing management would improve alfalfa forage productivity

and stand persistence.

The information in this report should be used in conjunction with other yield, pest resistance, and adaptation information in selecting the best alfalfa varieties for use in each individual situation.

When grazing alfalfa, good management for maximum life includes:

- Allowing grazing alfalfa to become completely established before grazing.
- Using rotational grazing where animals harvest available forage in seven days or less, followed by resting for 28 days before regrowing.
- Adding any needed fertilizer and lime.
- Removing grazing livestock from alfalfa fields from mid-September until November 1 to replenish root reserves for winter survival.

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**Table 5. Characterization and summary of persistence of alfalfa varieties under heavy grazing pressure across years at Lexington.**

Variety	Proprietor/KY Distributor	Variety Characteristics <sup>1</sup>						2008 <sup>3</sup>						2009			2010	
		FD <sup>4</sup>	Disease Resistance <sup>2</sup>					Apr	Oct	Apr	Nov	Apr	Nov	Apr	Apr	Nov	Mar	Nov
			BW	FW	AN	PRR	APH	2009 <sup>5</sup>	2010	2011	2010	2011	2011	2011	2011			
<b>Commercial Varieties-Available for Farm Use</b>																		
Alfagraze	America's Alfalfa	4	MR	R	MR	LR	-	*	*	x <sup>6</sup>	*	*	x	x	*	*	*	*
Ameristand 403T	America's Alfalfa	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	R	*	*	*	*	x	x				*	*
Ameristand 403TPlus	America's Alfalfa	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR							*	*	*		
Ameristand 407TQ	America's Alfalfa	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR							*	*	*		
Apollo	ABI/America's Alfalfa	4	R	R	LR	R	-	*	x	*	x	x	x	*	*	*	*	*
Archer III	America's Alfalfa	5	Hr	HR	HR	HR	HR							*	x	*		
LegenDairy 5.0	Croplan Genetics	3	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR	*	*	*	x	x	x					
PGI 424	Producer's Choice	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR							*			x	*
PGI 459	Producer's Choice	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR							*	x	*		
Spredor 4	Syngenta	2	HR	HR	HR	HR	R	*	*	*	x	x	x					
TS4007	Producer's Choice	4	HR	R	HR	HR	HR										x	*
TS 4010/A4535	Producer's Choice	4	HR	R	HR	HR	HR							*	*	*	*	*
<b>Experimental Varieties</b>																		
GA-MPX	Univ. of Georgia							*	*	*	*	*	*					

<sup>1</sup> Variety Characteristics: FD=Fall Dormancy, BW=Bacterial Wilt, FW=Fusarium Wilt, AN=Anthracnose, PRR=Phytophthora Root Rot, APH=Aphanomyces Root Rot.  
<sup>2</sup> Disease Resistance: S=Susceptible, LR=Low Resistance, MR=Medium Resistance, R=Resistance, HR=High Resistance.  
<sup>3</sup> Establishment year.  
<sup>4</sup> Fall Dormancy: 2=Vernal, 3=Ranger, 4=Saranac, 5=DuPuits.  
<sup>5</sup> Date of rating percent stand.  
<sup>6</sup> x in the block indicates the variety was in the test but the stand survival was significantly less than the most persistent variety. An open block indicates the variety was not in the test.  
\* Not significantly different from the most persistent variety.

**Table 6. Summary of Kentucky Alfalfa Grazing trials 1994-2011 (stand persistence shown as a percent of the grazing tolerant Alfagraze).**

Variety	Proprietor	Variety Characteristics <sup>1</sup>						Lexington											Mean <sup>5</sup> (#trials)
		Disease Resistance <sup>2</sup>						1994 <sup>3,4</sup>	1996	1997	1998	2000	2000	2001	2004	2005	2006	2008	
		FD	Bw	Fw	An	PRR	APH	3yr <sup>6</sup>	3yr	4yr	3yr	2yr	3yr	3yr	4yr	4yr	3yr	3yr	
ABT 205	W-L Research	2	HR	HR	HR	HR	R	94		84									89(2)
ABT 350	W-L Research	3	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR						46						-
ABT 405	W-L Research	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	R	71	129	69			46	100					83(5)
Alfagraze	Americas Alfalfa	2	MR	R	MR	R	-	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100(11)
Amerigraze 401+Z	Americas Alfalfa	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	R		120	53	56	26	85	125					78(6)
Ameristand 403T	Americas Alfalfa	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR									141	144	75	120(3)
Ameristand 407TQ	Americas Alfalfa	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR									136			-
Apollo	Americas Alfalfa	4	R	R	R	R	-	48	75	33	47	17	31	25		36	27	50	39(10)
Arc (certified)	Public	4	LR	MR	HR	-	-		38										-
Baralfa 54	Barenbrug USA	-	R	HR	HR	HR	HR				78								-
Cut-n-Graze	Americas Alfalfa	3	HR	HR	HR	HR	R	68											-
FK 421	Donley Seed Co.	4	HR	H	H	H	H							100					-
Feast	Garst Seeds	3	HR	HR	HR	HR	R		146			87	92						108(3)
Fortress	Syngenta	3	R	R	R	HR	R	40	71										56(2)
Gold Plus	PGI Alfalfa	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	R				81								-
Grazeking	FFR/Southern States	5	MR	HR	HR	R	S		91	41				50					61(3)
Haygrazer	Great Plains Research	4	HR	HR	R	R	MR		75	39			38						51(3)
Integrity	PGI Alfalfa	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR									172			-
Legacy	Green Seed	4	R	R	R	R	R	32											-
LegenDairy5.0	Croplan Genetics	3	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR											75	-
Magnagraze	Dairyland Seed Co.	3	HR	HR	R	HR	-	56											-
Pasture Plus	MBS	3	HR	HR	R	HR	MR	60											-
Pioneer 98	Pioneer	3	HR	R	HR	R	-				56								-
ProGro	MBS Inc.	4	HR	HR	R	HR	MR				81								-
Quantum	ABI Alfalfa	2	HR	HR	HR	HR	R	71											-
Rebel	Target Seed	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR											79	-
Rugged	Target Seed	3	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR											146	-
Rushmore	Syngenta	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR	32											-
Saranac AR (cert.)	Public	4	MR	R	HR	LR	-		77					100					89(2)
Spredor 3	Syngenta	1	HR	HR	R	MR	S	71	123		75					68			96(4)
Spredor 4	Syngenta	2	HR	HR	HR	HR	R											25	-
Stampede	Allied Seed	3	HR	R	R	HR	R		73										-
Triple Trust 450	ABI/America's Alfalfa	5	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR									145			-
Wintergreen	ABI Alfalfa	3	HR	HR	HR	HR	R	95		57	72								75(3)
WL 326GZ	W-L Research	4	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR		118		88								103(2)
115 Brand	Monsanto	3	HR	HR	R	HR	R					56	85						71(2)
5373	Pioneer	4	HR	HR	HRT	MR	LR	21											-
5432	Pioneer	4	HR	HR	-	MR	-								51				-

<sup>1</sup> Variety characteristics: FD=fall dormancy, Bw=bacterial wilt, Fw=fusarium wilt, An=anthracnose, PRR=phytophthera root rot,APH-aphanomyces root rot. Information provided by seed companies.

<sup>2</sup> Disease resistance: S=susceptible, LR=low resistance, MR=moderate resistance, R=resistance, HR=high resistance.

<sup>3</sup> Year trial was established

<sup>4</sup> Use this summary table as a guide in making variety decisions, but refer to specific yearly reports to determine statistical differences in stand persistence between varieties. To find actual persistence ratings, look in the yearly report for the final year of each specific test. For example, the Lexington trial planted in 1996 was grazed for 3 years so final persistence report would be "1999 Alfalfa Grazing Tolerance Report" archived in the KY Forage website at <www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage>.

<sup>5</sup> Mean only presented when respective variety was included in two or more trials.

<sup>6</sup> Number of years of data



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