Cornell Cooperative Extension
Delaware County

Watershed Agricultural Council
nycwatershed.org

2026 Forage Quality Scissors Cut Results

Frosty Start

Welcome to the first Forage Quality Scissors Cut report for 2026.

The CCE and WAC Team sampled sites in Delaware County and the NYC Watershed on May 5. Each Tuesday in May, the team measures plant height and collects a representative sample of the primary grasses and legumes at 4 inch cut height typical of hay harvest. Samples are shipped overnight to the Dairy One Forage lab where they are analyzed by NIR, and results are available on Wednesday. CCE summarizes the results and sends reports on Thursday. CCE is grateful to Dairy One for providing the analysis at no charge, and their commitment to support dairy and livestock farmers in our region.

Variable weather and several very frosty nights have caused slow growth in many fields. So slow a few fields we visited were too short to sample. All the fields we sampled had significant frost damage, in many fields we estimate 2” to 4” of top of growth has been lost. The orchardgrass in this photo shows typical condition in most fields. It’s unclear how this will affect first cutting yield and quality. We will continue to monitor and do our best to help you make informed decisions on your first cut.

Figure 1 charts grass height in the first week of May over the years. This shows what most of us already know, no two springs are alike, and if there is a trend, I think it is toward more variability. 2025 had almost the tallest growth since 2004, while the height in 2026 is the shortest.

Figure 1

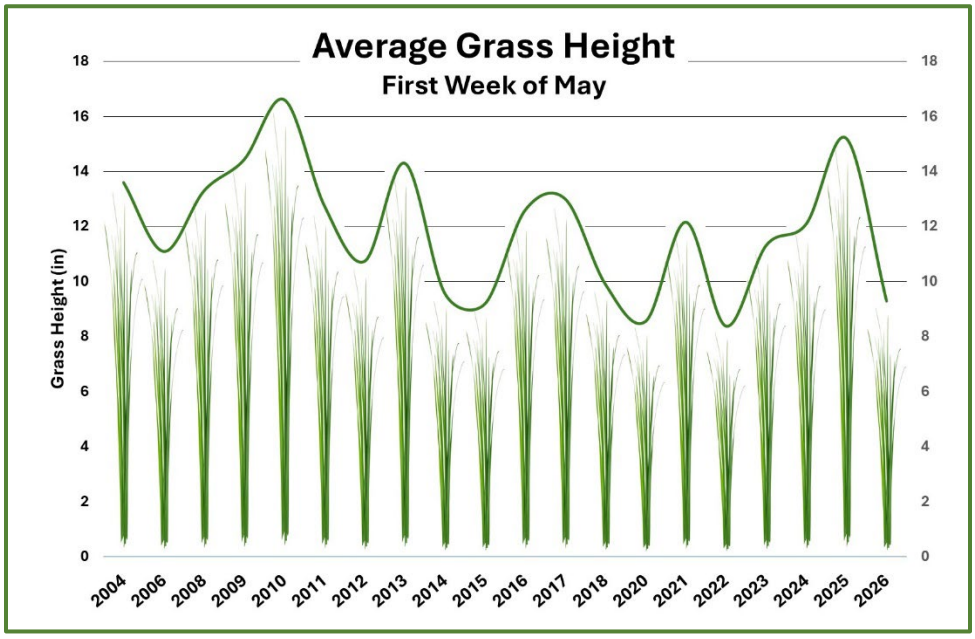
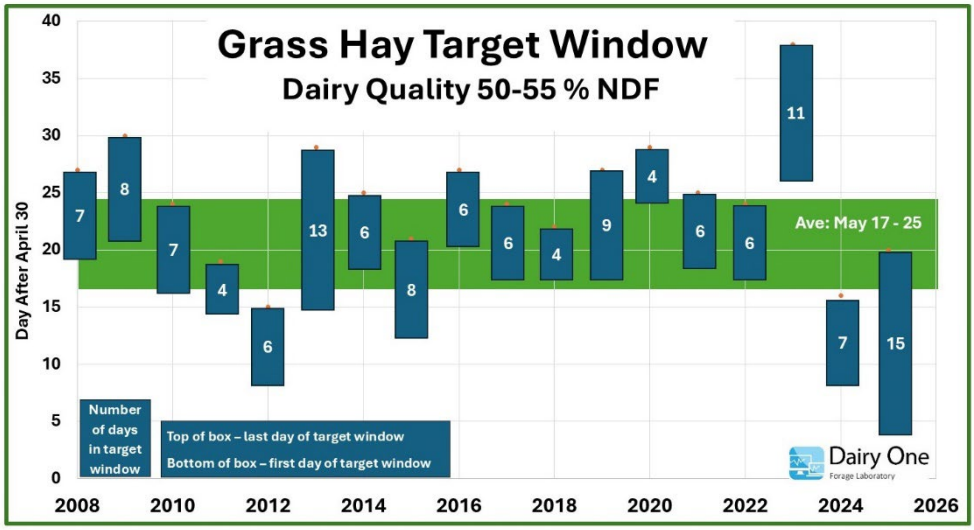


Figure 2 looks at our scissors cut results from 2008-2025. It charts the target harvest window for dairy quality, starting at the date grass reaches 50% NDF until the day it reaches 55% NDF. Averaging across all years we find NDF increases by about 0.6 points per day, making the average width of the target window 8 days. The actual duration of the harvest window has been as short as 4 days (2011 and 2018) and as long as 15 days (2025).

Figure 2



The average start date of the target window is May 17. 2023 had the latest target window for dairy quality grass hay (beginning May 26), 2025 had the earliest (May 4).

Sample results this week, reported on the next page, were quite variable, but none were at a target window. Early May fiber samples can sometimes be difficult to use for prediction, especially when plants are more immature. Fiber levels can be unchanged or even lower the second week of May. The frosted plants this year make the next couple weeks harder to predict.

We will sample each Tuesday in May, send the samples to Diary One lab for NIR analysis, and plan to send reports on Thursdays. Our next sample day will be May 12.

The key to successfully managing through the chaos is having everything prepared and being nimble and ready to act when the conditions are right.

A note on early harvest of grasses. As grasses grow and start the heading process, the growing point is at the top of the stem as it elongates. If plants are cut before the growing point is above the cutting height, the cut plant will continue to push the seed head up, resulting in regrowth that looks like all heads. When this happens, the grass will eventually fill in, but quality will be reduced. This is something to consider if you are cutting very early. You can split a few grass stems and see the length of the developing stem. If the growing point is lower than cutting height you may want to wait a day or two to avoid rapid heading of the regrowth.

Dairy One
Forage Laboratory
Special thanks to Dairy One for providing the sample analysis

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Delaware County

Watershed Agricultural Council
nycwatershed.org

2026 Scissors Cut Results

Delaware County Scissors Cuts Results				May 5, 2026			
Farm	Town	Elev	Species	Ht	aNDFom	NDFD 30	TDN
Eisele	Andes	1590	Mixed Grasses	6	45.3	80.4	66
Gladstone	Andes	2250	Orchardgrass	7	39.3	86.1	68
Gladstone	Andes	2250	Orchardgrass	7	44.4	86	65
Brannen	Bovina	1180	Mixed Grasses	6	42.3	84.8	66
Mattson	Colchester	1100	Alf(60%)/T Fesc	9/12	34.6	68	65
Grant	Davenport	1290	Alfalfa	10	24.4	68	68
Mushkoday	Delhi	1320	Alf(65%)/Grass	9/4	20.2	65	71
Rama	Delhi	1380	Mixed Grasses	8	41.7	78.7	68
Frisbee	Delhi	1380	Mixed Grasses	10	50.9	73.6	65
Sullivan	Delhi	1430	Clov(40%)Orch	5/8	42.7	81.9	67
Shephard	Delhi	2050	Mixed Grasses	8	43.4	80.3	65
Coombe	Fallsburg	1180	Tall Fescue	8	40	87.2	67
Buel	Franklin	1260	Alf (50%)/Orch	10/12	30.2	80.1	67
Grant	Franklin	1650	Mixed Grasses	12	40	87.2	69
Taggart	Franklin	1720	Orchardgrass	8	42.6	83.9	66
DiBenedatto	Halcott	1730	Mixed Grasses	11	43	80.1	64
Scobie	Hamden	1480	Orchardgrass	10	43.5	94.2	75
Miller	Hamden	1600	Alf(50%)Orch	6/8	47.2	81.2	64
Potter	Hamden	2100	Mixed Grasses	7	40.8	84.7	68
Potter	Hamden	2100	Alf(70%)/Grass	6/7	26.6	74.3	69
Hillriegel	Hardenburgh	1700	Orchardgrass	10	47.4	81.5	65
Boest	Kortright	1948	Orchardgrass	10	46.5	80.1	64
Hager	Kortright	2000	Tall Fescue	8	38.2	85.2	69
Scott	Masonville	1620	Orchardgrass	14	42.1	83.7	69
Keator	Meredith	1600	Tall Fescue	9	39.8	85.5	68
Gray	Middletown	2020	RCanary/Orch	12	45.7	87.6	63
Elliot	Middletown	2060	RCanary/Orch	11	45	79.8	66
Coombe	Neversink	1340	Mixed Grasses	10	40.9	86.1	67
Coombe	Neversink	1420	Orchardgrass	8	41.6	86.6	66
Perry	Roxbury	1720	Orchardgrass	10	45.6	81.1	64
Gockel	Roxbury	1890	Mixed Grasses	10	45.2	83.2	66
Albano	Roxbury	1950	Meadow Foxtail	8	42.6	78.9	65
Kuhn	Roxbury	1980	Meadow Foxtail	12	45.9	70.4	66
Johnson	Sidney	1070	Alfalfa	12	23.7	71.4	70
Hanselman	Stamford	1490	Mixed Grasses	9	27.1	60	67
Martin	Stamford	1560	Alf (35%)/Orch	9/13	38.5	77.5	65
Ryan	Stamford	1750	Orchardgrass	5	50	79	63
Melvin	Stamford	2020	Mixed Grasses	10	43.4	80.5	66
McClure	Stamford	2080	Alf(70%)/Orch	11/8	36.5	80.2	68
Trovato	Stamford	2200	Mixed Grasses	12	46.6	83.1	64
LaTourette	Tompkins	1220	Mixed Grasses	8	44.8	81	66
Wickham	Walton	1240	Orchardgrass	14	42.3	81.9	67
Marsiglio	Walton	1720	Mixed Grasses	5	43.2	83	66
			Av Grass	**8.7**	**43.0**	**81.8**	**66.4**
			Av Mixed	**-**	**34.6**	**76.0**	**67.0**
			Av Alfalfa	**9.2**	**24.1**	**69.7**	**69.0**

Precision Feed Management
Watershed Agricultural Council
Cornell Cooperative Extension Delaware County

Dairy One
Forage Laboratory

Special Thanks to Dairy One for providing the sample analysis

NDF Goals for Dairy Cattle Forage	
Grass hay and silage	48 – 55%
MMG hay & silage	40 – 50%
MML hay & silage	38 – 45%
Legume hay & silage	36 – 42%

TDN Goals for Beef Cattle Forage	
Growing Calf (2lb ADG)	70 - 72
Growing Yearling (2lb ADG)	64 - 66
Lactating Beef Cow	60 - 64
Mature Dry Cow	52 - 55

ccedelaware.org