



Conservation Practice Overview

October 2020

Forage Harvest Management (Code 511)

Forage harvest management includes timely cutting and removal of forages as hay, green-chop, or ensilage.

Practice Information

This practice applies to all land uses where forage is machine harvested.

Forage is harvested at a frequency and height that optimizes the desired forage stand, plant community, and stand life.



When harvesting for feed, health considerations for specific plant and animal species must be considered. Depending on the plant material, drought conditions may increase nitrate levels in forages to the point of possible toxicity, while prussic acid poisoning may be an issue with frosted material.

In conjunction with harvest options, storage and feeding options may be needed that will retain acceptable forage quality and minimize digestible dry matter loss.

Where weather conditions make it difficult to harvest the desired quality of forage, use of mechanical or chemical conditioners, and/or ensiling may be required.

Harvest may be delayed if prolonged or heavy precipitation is forecast that would reduce forage quality.

Green-chopping or ensiling the forage to reduce or eliminate field-drying time may be necessary in regions where rainfall and/or humidity levels cause unacceptable forage quality losses. Other options include the use of desiccants, preservatives, or macerating implements to reduce field-drying time.

Common Associated Practices

NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Forage Harvest Management (Code 511) is commonly applied with other conservation practices, such as NRCS CPSs Pasture and Hay Planting (Code 512), Herbaceous Weed Treatment (Code 315), Nutrient Management (Code 590), Pest Management Conservation System (Code 595), and Waste Utilization (Code 633).

For further information, contact your local NRCS field office.