Bill: And welcome in to our Thursday edition of Ag Talk. This is Bill Rice along with Ed Lentz and what the hay. Let’s talk about hay cutting time this morning Ed.

Ed: Well for most farmers this is kind of, I’m going to give an academic answer for this, but for most farmers we’re going to cut the hay when we can cut it. That means if the weather is such that we can cut it and we can dried and baled before the next rain comes in. And we have such humid conditions that often times a lot of rain events in the spring it’s always a challenge for a farmer to get it cut. So even though we have an ideal growth stage we like to see it cut it generally is when the weather cooperates that it is what it is and we can finally do it. But from an academic side, from the research side, we know that probably the best time to cut alfalfa is right at an early bloom or 10% bloom and for a person looking at it is going to be when it is just starting to bloom. And with alfalfa it is a perennial plant out there so we want to keep it from year to year and if we do it right we can keep the field of alfalfa productive for 5 to 7 years. But to do that there is a compromise between three things that we have to look for in that alfalfa and that is yield, quality, and persistence. We know the later I go in harvesting that alfalfa it’s going to increase the yield and so if you’re just looking for tonnage we can do that. But the problem is the later we go the quality goes down because we get fiber to build up in those stems and it doesn’t digest well and the animals can’t utilize it. So we got that comprise between getting maximum yield and also good quality so the animal can eat it. And then the third thing in the comprise is persistence. The longer we let the alfalfa go the more it has reserves going back and can do better from cut to cut. If we cut it to early besides from having less yield we may also effect the life of the stand. So that’s where this research says early bloom around 10% bloom is a compromise to get the best of those three. None of them will be the greatest individually but it’s going to be the best of all three for all characteristics. A person needs to keep in mind if you’ve got mainly grasses the best time to harvest grass is what we call boot to early heading, where the head is just coming out of the stem. It will depend on the species. The most common ones we use around here is going to be orchard grass, tall fescue, and ryegrass. If you do have smooth bromegrass you got to wait until it flowers to see the answers on it. If you cut it before it flowers you won’t get new growth and you are going to lose the stand. We have some of that around here usually it’s combined by itself and farmers don’t plant it. By far orchard grass, tall fescue and ryegrass are the most common species. So keep that in mind if you do have good weather and you are at the right time that’s going to be the best quality hay but most of the time, Bill, we harvest when we can finally get out there and do it.

Bill: Thank you Ed, for Ag Talk this is Bill Rice with Ed Lentz. Good morning to you.

Ed: Good morning.