

Why's of Agriculture: Why are some fields harvested now, and yet others harvested later?

By Aimee Delaney, Ag Relations

The true harvest season is still yet to come, but depending on type of farming operations around you there could be several times a year when a light harvest needs to be done. It's still early in the summer and at this particular time of the year we still have a considerable amount of growing season to get through before the fall sets in and plants stop growing for the year.

So why do some of the fields get harvested now, while others aren't harvested until later? And why are some fields harvested more than once?



Simply put, annual crops (maybe add a couple of examples) are seeded with one large harvest (most often seeded in the spring and harvested in the fall). Perennial crops (again a couple of examples) on the other hand are more of a permanent crop in that once they are seeded they may be left to grow for several years or more, with nothing more than a mow once or twice a year, and are rarely cultivated. Because hay doesn't get harvested each year the root structure of the crop is able to overwinter and use its strong root structure to grow earlier in the spring than seeded annual crops.

Perennial crops, like hay, have the ability to be harvested, or 'hayed', multiple times during the year, depending on the location and temperatures. In our climate zone haying can generally be done twice a year provided the recovery period of the hay plants and/or grass mixtures is long enough that it can grow back for a '2nd cut', ie. no early winters. Once the hay is harvested it will be baled or cut into silage and stored to be sold or used when the grass no longer grows but the cows remain hungry.

So while we still have some time before the big harvest of the fall begins, don't be surprised if you see some farmers in the fields haying their 1st cut of the year. Don't be afraid to give them a wave and a shout a big "hey!".. :]

Each month we'll dig into a new 'Why?' of agriculture. If you have an agricultural question you'd like me to dig into let me know at adelaney@rdcounty.ca