

# Pre-Cut Straw

Pre-cut straw, also known as head straw, is a bedding product made by harvesting immature cereal grains as soon as the head emerges. This process works on both fall and spring planted cereals and produces straw that is often less dusty than traditional post grain harvest straw. Another large benefit is that the straw crop can be taken off several weeks earlier than a traditional cereal crop, allowing the following crop to be planted several weeks earlier.

Any winter or spring cereal grain can be used. The most popular are cereal rye, triticale, and barley. For winter grains, vernalization (cold temperatures) will initialize stem elongation in the early spring. If weather conditions prevented seeding down in the fall a spring cultivar will do nicely. Spring triticale will give the largest volume of straw for spring planted crops. Barley straw is high quality but spring barley will not yield as many tons. Spring oats can be used for pre-cut straw and is high yielding but the forage is less absorbent as a straw product and the market often discriminates the dollar value of oat straw accordingly.

Plant 100-150 lbs of seed per acre. Fertilize with manure application preplant or a moderate amount of nitrogen to limit lodging potential. When the seed head has emerged (Feekes 10.1) and the anthers (yellow pollen) begin to drop from the seed heads, THAT is the time to swathe the crop into a wide, shallow windrow. Some producers will use glyphosate to enhance the drying. Bayer/Monsanto label supports this use. Spray with .67L/Acre of PowerMax or Weather Max; wait a full three days post spraying to swath, then wait a full seven days to harvest. Consult your chemical retailer for further instructions or refer to the label. Spraying prior to swath is not required, in fact under ideal conditions for drying a chemical application will lengthen the harvest interval. Waiting until this growth stage ensures maximum dry matter accumulation and a nice hollow stem to speed drying at harvest while maximizing the absorbency of the finished bedding product.

Ted out the crop to promote even sun bleaching of the material, some producers actually welcome a little rain to enhance bleaching out of crop. When moisture is below 15% you can bale up in your choice of package sizes. Small bales capture the highest margin but entail the largest labor and handling costs. This product should be bright, clean and very marketable!

