

# Hay: Cool season with little rain delays and

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endangered hay crop by cutting it until the weather is good."

For Amenia dairy farmer Peter Coon, who runs about 300 cows and devotes 450 to 500 acres to growing hay, cutting will start Tuesday. He said he had looked over his crop already.

"It looks thick but short due to the cold winter and the dry weather," he said.

## Don't overreact — yet

Tetor said that there are normally three cuttings of hay fields over the course of the summer spaced six to seven weeks apart. While the first cutting is normally the biggest and best, there is always a chance that the rains will fall over the next six weeks to improve prospects for the second cutting.

The problem is that the second

and third cuttings generally produce far less hay than does the first.

"All we need is just average rainfall," Tetor explained. "Not counting Wednesday's storm, all we had in the last five weeks as about half the six inches we normally get."

On average, the month of May brings a little over 4 inches of rain to the mid-Hudson region. But with the month nearly over, only about 2

inches of rain had fallen.

"If we don't get some rain and if this weather pattern continues," said Julie Schroeder, "everything's going to suffer."

## Paying twice

In economic terms, Tetor explained, "less hay harvested means that farmers must buy more commercially-grown hay and feed for their animals. That means they wind up paying twice: First

they must pay for the tractors and other equipment needed to grow, harvest and bale hay whether that hay grows or not. But since it hasn't grown, they are also paying to buy what they are paying for all the equipment to grow and harvest."

"The expense of a dairy farm op-

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## reduces the harvest

eration is so loaded to begin with that any additional unusual expense just adds to the possibility that a farmer will be forced out of business," he said.

And dairy farms have been going out of business with wrenching regularity.

According to the New York State

Census of Agriculture, there are 45 dairy operations in Dutchess County — about 30 percent of what there were 15 years ago in 1980, when there was 155.

The dropout rate has been a steady one, Tetor said. By 1987, there were only 105 dairy operations left, a number that has continued to tumble in the 90s.