

# **KENTUCKY ALFALFA CONFERENCE**

## **25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

*Garry D. Lacefield*  
*Extension Forage Specialist*  
*University of Kentucky*

Today marks the 25th consecutive year we have come together for a full day's conference featuring "Alfalfa - Queen of the Forages" as the theme and focal point. Only one other state in the U.S. has such an annual event.

**The Beginning** - I have always had respect for alfalfa and even selected alfalfa as the crop that I did my Ph.D. work on at the University of Missouri. Warren Thompson had a very active and effective extension program in alfalfa throughout his career. Ken Evans and I had an active extension program on alfalfa during the seventies. Two key events during 1980 resulted in a renewed emphasis on alfalfa in Kentucky and the beginning of the Alfalfa Conference.

In the summer of 1980, I was invited by the Certified Alfalfa Seed Council on a study tour of the alfalfa seed producing area in five western states. During that tour, I met, got to know and visited with some of the leading alfalfa "experts" in the U.S. Their experience and enthusiasm and the opportunities offered me during that tour resulted in me returning to Kentucky with a renewed enthusiasm for alfalfa and its role in Kentucky. At that time, Kentucky had approximately 150,000 acres of alfalfa. A University of Kentucky study conducted earlier indicated a million acre potential.

In the fall of 1980, and shortly after my trip out west, we scheduled a KFGC Board meeting in Louisville. I had made arrangements for some farm visits in Shelby County on the afternoon before the board meeting. Dr. Monroe Rasnake traveled with me from Princeton to Louisville. During check-in at the hotel, Charlie Schnitzler and Wallace Campbell came in the lobby after driving in from Lincoln County. I invited Charlie and Wallace to accompany us on the farm visits. They agreed and we were off to Shelby County on a beautiful fall day to visit alfalfa fields. Roy Catlett had several visits lined-up. I remember visiting several fields with Jack and Frederica Clore. We also visited other alfalfa fields on several farms in the county. It was a most enjoyable afternoon and I learned a lot from Charlie and Wallace as we traveled. During these visits, Roy and I discussed the possibility of having a winter meeting just on alfalfa since there was so much interest in the County. Charlie Schnitzler told me during our travels that he felt the opportunities for alfalfa in Kentucky were great and encouraged me to place greater emphasis on this high yielding, high-quality crop. As always, Charlie volunteered to help in any way.

Over the next few weeks I developed some plans for a statewide meeting and discussed these plans with Ken Evans, Warren Thompson, Monroe Rasnake, Charlie Schnitzler and several county agents. Each of these people were most supportive and encouraged me to move ahead.

In January of 1981, we had our first Kentucky Alfalfa Conference in Shelbyville and repeated it in Princeton. The attendance, participation and feedback was excellent. In 1982, the 2nd Annual Kentucky Alfalfa Conference was held in Lexington and Princeton in conjunction with the National Alfalfa Symposium. In 1984, we met in Princeton and with standing room only realized we had out grown that facility. We continued to meet each year (Table 1) with attendance of 200 to over 400.

1981	Shelbyville/Princeton
1982	Lexington*/Princeton
1983	Cave City
1984	Princeton
1985	Elizabethtown
1986 & 1987	Cave City
1988	Mt. Sterling
1989 through 1997	Cave City
1998	Bowling Green*
1999 through 2005	Cave City

\*Held in conjunction with National Alfalfa Symposium

**Program Content** - A review of the programs over the past twenty-four years indicates we have spent a lot of time on the basics. Soils, fertility, weed control, insect and disease control, establishment, varieties, harvesting, handling, storing, grazing, quality, marketing, economics, and alfalfa in livestock feeding programs have been frequent topics on past programs. Producers have been featured on many of the programs over the year and it was a producer, Mr. Charlie Schnitzler that served as our keynote speaker on our first conference program. In addition to the basics, we have complemented the program with timely, cutting-edge issues dealing with advances in seed coating, variety development, hybrid alfalfa, grazing tolerance, Roundup Ready, balage, pest management, etc.

**Hay Show** - In 1989, we began the Hay Show in cooperation with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and later joined by the Kentucky Pride Hay Growers Association. The contest was sponsored by Garst Seed Company. Approximately \$3,000 in prizes and trophies were awarded. The program has changed over the past decade. At present, in cooperation with the Kentucky Forage and Grassland Council, University of Kentucky and Kentucky Department of Agriculture, we present awards for

the “monthly” highest quality alfalfa and alfalfa-grass hay tested through the Department of Agriculture.

**Industry - A Valuable Assist** - With only two exceptions, we have had exhibits at each conference. We value the support and contributions of all our exhibitors. Several exhibitors here today have been present at every conference. I have never asked one of the exhibitors for anything that they didn't readily agree. Their financial contributions have helped us keep all our bills paid. Our surveys indicate that participants enjoy getting to visit with all the exhibitors and that exhibitors enjoy having the opportunity to meet and visit with Kentucky's leaders in alfalfa production, research and education.

**Awards** – During the 20<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Alfalfa Conference and in cooperation with the Kentucky Forage & Grassland Council, the Alfalfa Awards Program was initiated. Since 2000, we have recognized outstanding achievement in the Producer, Public and Industry segments (Table 2).

<b>Table 2. Kentucky Alfalfa Awards Recipients</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Warren Thompson Industry Award</b>	<b>Charlie Schnitzler Producer Award</b>	<b>Garry D. Lacefield Public Service Award</b>
2005			
2004	Gary Coughlin	Minos Cox	Mike Collins
2003	Phil Howell	Lee Robey	Monroe Rasnake Jimmy Henning
2002	Tom Keene	John Nowak	Billy Ray Smith
2001	Bill Talley	Larry Jeffries	Timothy H. Taylor W. C. Templeton, Jr.
2000	Warren Thompson	Sue Schnitzler*	Garry Lacefield

\*Accepted on behalf of her father who was tragically killed in a farming accident on March 11, 1991.

**Summary** – It’s hard to believe when this Conference started, my oldest son was four years old. At the 24<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Alfalfa Conference he was a speaker. Now, he is a new father and I am a new Papa. Time indeed has passed fast. I have been involved in many different conferences, symposia, and meetings over the years, but this Conference has been special. It is special for two important reasons: 1) the plant – Alfalfa—Queen of the Forage Crops – has been a tried and true performer. It has proven it’s abilities to produce high yields and high quality and be a moneymaker, 2) people – I have never come to this Conference without thinking of all the people that work so hard to make it happen. From my inspiration initially (Charlie Schnitzler) to this group of special friends that I have invited to speak here today and all those in-between I say THANK YOU. I am also appreciative of the exhibitors who have been so supportive, to all the County Agents who give unselfishly to insure the Conference runs

smooth. I am thankful to all who have attended over the past 25 years from throughout Kentucky along with 32 other states and nine countries. I also want to thank the Kentucky Forage & Grassland Council, Department of Agriculture, and the U.K. Agronomy Department for their many contributions.

Special THANK YOU to our core committee who have worked closely with me including: Dr. Monroe Rasnake, Mr. Bill Talley, Mr. Tom Keene, Mr. Ken Johnson, Mr. Phil Howell, Dr. Jimmy Henning and the Mammoth Cave Extension Agents for Agriculture & Natural Resources.

I close with a very special THANK YOU to Christi Forsythe, who has done the most to make this Conference such a success. Her attention to details in preparing programs, coordinating exhibits, editing proceedings, and keeping the records is much appreciated.