

GETTING MORE FROM YOUR ALFALFA

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Powell Farms started in 1996 with 15 acres of Alfalfa hay intended for cow/calf feed. A neighbor and his friends bought every bale that year. Over the next 14 years the only alfalfa hay our cows got to eat was when a cutting got wet and was rolled. Production per acre was good, demand exceeded production and price per bale continued to rise. Roundup Ready came on the market and we were finally able to produce clean pure high quality alfalfa. All was going well for our alfalfa business. Then came the 2008 challenge with the economic down turn, drought and off the chart alfalfa prices. Then in 2009 the horse market went into a decline and the demand for horse grade alfalfa went down. For the first time we carried over unsold 2000 bales from 2009 to 2010. It seemed to be a good time to start looking for another market outlet for Powell Farms Alfalfa.

Powell Farms continued to run a small cow/calf Angus herd. We tried to get the calves up to about 800 lbs and market them as feeders. Occasionally we would finish one out on corn for the freezer but the ethanol demand had pushed up the price of corn to a point that was no longer an option. We had had good results in putting weight on horses with high protein alfalfa and the thought came to me that maybe we could do the same with calves. We had tried finishing calves on pasture with only marginal success. An opportunity became available to market packaged beef cuts through a UK sponsored Farmers' Market in Western Kentucky in early 2010. Market research indicated that the customers were open to beef not finished on corn, free from antibiotics, steroids and growth hormones. We started with a couple of big steers on good pasture and at the end of summer moved them to a small lot with spring water, shade and limited pasture. They were hand fed twice per day and got about 20 lbs of 20% protein pure alfalfa per day for about 60 days. They had a live weight of about 1300 lbs and a carcass weight of 780 lbs. We located a USDA inspected packing facility that agreed to pack each piece individually in vacuum seal clear wrap and label for individual package sale. Sales at the farmer's market were good, the flavor was great and the cuts tender. As of May 2010 Powell Farms had another outlet for our Alfalfa production.