

MARKETING KENTUCKY ALFALFA

Nicky Baker
Hay/Beef Producer
Fredonia, Kentucky

I'm Nicky Baker, a fifth generation farmer from the Fredonia Valley area in Western Kentucky. I'm blessed to have Crider and Pembroke soils, which are ideally suited for raising good alfalfa. I sold my first alfalfa hay in 1976 or 1977. I've seen many changes since then, both in production and especially in marketing.

The main key to marketing hay over the years is flexibility. Don't gear up too heavy for the one specific market. Keep your options open and remember there aren't any government payments.

Milk prices fluxuate so some years dairymen are looking for hay and other years they are not. In my area the horse market is mostly recreational. When the economy is good, people spend on horses and everything else for that matter. When things tighten up, the horse is the first one to go on a diet. Right now, the killer horse market is way down. Recently, the new player has become the meat goat market. How it develops is anyone's guess. Over the years, once in awhile someone buys a few bales for milk goats.

I learned early on that all alfalfa won't sell. Especially now, with more production and everyone doing a better job, common hay won't pay its way in a square bale. As I have increased alfalfa acreage and decreased tobacco production, I have added around 225 head of beef cows. Greater emphasis is placed on grazing, especially in late summer. Graded feeder calf sales or CPH sales now play a major role in marketing hay.

My latest venture in selling alfalfa came this year when I sold the entire 3rd and 4th cuttings standing in the field. All I had to do was cut, ted, and put it in a wide row. I'm still not quite sure I recommend it, but it cut out the labor and repair bills. Time will tell.