

KENTUCKY ALFALFA CONFERENCE AFTER TWENTY YEARS

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Today marks the 20th consecutive year we have come together for a full days 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 two 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 & 2000	Cave City
*Held in conjunction with National Alfalfa Symposium	

Not everyone in Kentucky is extremely happy with me coming back to Cave City each year. This is a good facility, one of the most economical in the state and is within a 90 minute drive of the majority of the alfalfa in the state. Survey results indicate you like coming here.

Program Content - A review of the programs over the past nineteen 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.

Marketing was a major theme beginning back in 1982 when we featured the Larue County group (Roger Sparrow, Eric Hinton and J.H. Ragland) and Ken

Evans. Ken Evans went on to speak on some phase of marketing at almost all conferences through 1989 when his topic was "Marketing Kentucky Hay - A Reality". In my opinion, no one worked harder during the decade of the 80's than Ken Evans to organize and implement a hay marketing program in Kentucky. His dedication, insight, desire and persistence made it happen. Others, including producers, U.K. personnel, Department of Agriculture personnel, and KPHGA personnel have spoken on marketing over the years. Commissioner Billy Ray Smith gave the keynote address on Marketing in 1999.

In 1985, we began to place more emphasis on "GRAZING" with Dr. Chuck Dougherty giving a presentation at the 5th Kentucky Alfalfa Conference. We have continued to emphasize grazing and invited Dr. Harlan White from Virginia to speak on grazing in 1991, Warren Thompson, Joe Burns (Tennessee), Roy Burris, Ken Johnson and Steve Osborne all addressed grazing in 1993. Other speakers to address alfalfa as a grazing crop have included Dan Grigson, Garry Lacefield, Gary Bates (Tennessee) and Joe Bouton (Georgia).

Dr. Mike Collins has been a frequent guest speaker covering many aspects of harvest management. He has presented results of research on chemical preservation and barn drying, along with results on effects of weather on hay production and quality.

Quality has been a sub-theme of most every conference. We have emphasized the importance of quality, factors affecting quality, methods for evaluating quality, and marketing strategies for varying qualities of alfalfa. In 1988, Dr. W. C. Templeton, Jr. discussed "Evaluating Hay Quality". He discussed in detail the NIR technology. In 1991, Dr. Jimmy Henning continued the evaluating quality theme and extended it to interpreting results.

Mr. Warren Thompson served as the lead-off speaker in 1987 with a most interesting presentation on "Alfalfa in Kentucky - Past, Present and Future". His experiences, insights and enthusiasm are second to none when it comes to ALFALFA.

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 Hay & Grain Division, we present awards for the "monthly" highest quality alfalfa and alfalfa-grass hay tested through the Department of Agriculture. My thanks to Dr. Jimmy Henning and Mr. Allen Johnson for coordinating this program.

Industry - A Valuable Assist - With only two exceptions, we have had exhibits each year. 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.

The Future - The past three years have not been good years for Kentucky Alfalfa. Three consecutive wet springs have reduced the number of seedings and resulted in lower quality hay. Three consecutive dry "late-summers" including the "drought of 1999" resulted in very few acres being seeded successfully. As a result, acreage is down substantially.

Interest and opportunity for alfalfa in Kentucky is high. I am optimistic that weather conditions will be more favorable this year and we will see significant acres seeded to alfalfa and alfalfa-grass mixtures.

I am also very optimistic about all the new technologies emerging in the alfalfa industry. New varieties, new pest control strategies (Roundup Ready, potato leafhopper tolerance, etc.). Greater interest in alfalfa as a grazing crop, new research on autotoxicity, no-till, and harvest management will permit producers to be more successful than ever before.

I want to close by taking this opportunity to thank each of you for your support and encouragement over the years. In addition to all of those listed above individually and collectively, I want to say a special thank you to Dr. Oran Little for his encouragement to start the Conference and for his support over the years. In addition, I want to thank Warren Thompson, Monroe Rasnake, Bill Talley, Larry Jeffries and Tom Keene for all they have done. A special thanks to all the County Agents, especially the Mammoth Cave group for going the extra mile. And last, I want to say a "very special THANK YOU" to Christi Forsythe for handling all the details. The success of this Conference is very much a testimony to Christi's hard work, dedication and attention to details.