

## PRODUCING AND MARKETING KENTUCKY HAY—A CHALLENGE

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Many of you probably are aware that Kentucky's commodity organizations are working with UK, the Agriculture Department and Farm Bureau in developing a plan to improve farm income in the state. This is a very ambitious project involving more than 40 farm organizations, including the Kentucky Forage and Grassland Council. This group has set a lofty goal of attempting to raise gross farm sales in the state from its current \$3 billion level to around \$5 billion by the turn of the century.

This is no small undertaking, but something I feel can be accomplished if everyone works cooperatively and we receive the necessary support from the Governor's Office and the legislature.

When you look at the potential for the various commodities, forage production is simply unsurpassed in terms of how it could impact farm income. We have a tremendous growth potential for marketing quality forages, particularly alfalfa. But, forages also can play an important part in the economic expansion of our beef and dairy industries.

I realize that those of you who regularly attend this annual Alfalfa Conference have heard these issues discussed on many occasions. I'm not an Agronomist, an Animal Scientist nor an Economist—so I'm certainly not qualified to suggest what you should be doing with your hay to put more money in your pocket.

I am a farmer and a public official with a responsibility for policies and programs that strengthen our agricultural industry—and in that capacity, I feel confident in saying that Kentucky, indeed, has an opportunity to make alfalfa a more significant cash crop.

You obviously realize and appreciate alfalfa's importance to our agriculture industry, and your presence at this 13th annual conference underscores your commitment to producing quality forages.

You know that quality alfalfa brings premium prices. You know that quality alfalfa has a consistent value and demand. You know that there is a chronic shortage of alfalfa in the southeastern states which creates a year-round market opportunity for Kentucky producers.

Although we have made good progress in recent years, Kentucky is far from reaching its full potential in producing and marketing quality alfalfa. If alfalfa is to become a major cash crop in this state, we must do a better job of promoting the proven production practices that improve both quality and quantity. If we develop the product, I think we'll find a sufficient market demand.

I realize this is easier said than done. All of us know that the greatest limitation is our climate. In the past five years along, we have had three unfavorable growing seasons—two of which were too dry and one which was too wet. The unpredictability of our weather also is detrimental to our curing processes.

But, through intensive management, we can meet that particular challenge more often than not.

Finding and maintaining new markets for our alfalfa is no easy task, either. We will have to out perform those to the north who are servicing our horse farms, and those in the west who are selling to the southeastern dairies. But, we know that can be done, because some of you here today have been doing it for years.

And, we know how it is done: Quality, volume, reliability, integrity and a cost-effective transportation system. The challenge is to make it work on a larger scale, and on a consistent basis.

I encourage everyone here today to utilize our department's hay testing program. If you have quality hay, the test result has been proven to be a good marketing tool. Our records show that hay testing high in protein and relative feed value consistently brings higher prices than what is reported for non-tested hay. That's because the buyer is assured of the quality, and therefore is more inclined to pay a little more.

Testing hay also is an important part of a balanced ration feeding program. If you know the feed value, you know exactly what to supplement and in what amounts. This will save money while enabling you to do a better job of producing beef or milk.

If you are truly interested and committed to cash hay production, Kentucky has the resources to help make your enterprise a success. The University of Kentucky and Western Kentucky University are fortunate to have top-notch people working in forage production. In fact, I don't know of any state that has more capable extension forage specialists than Garry Lacefield, Jimmy Henning and Linda Brown. They are top-notch people who can be of great assistance to you.

I'm not aware of any other state that has a testing program that surpasses what we have in Kentucky. We have certified state-of-the-art equipment at three locations, a mobile van and a computerized record-keeping system. I challenge you to take very opportunity to utilize those resources.

We also have a statewide marketing organization, the Kentucky Pride Hay Growers Association, that affords you many advantages in selling quality tested hay. The KPHGA can find a buyer for your hay, arrange for transportation and most importantly, guarantees your payment. I challenge you to look at how KPHGA can help you.

In conclusion, I want to challenge you to participate in the effort to strengthen the forage industry in our state. Kentucky's farmers currently are producing about

\$360 million worth of forages a year, including more than \$125 million worth of alfalfa. Although tobacco is our most important crop in terms of cash receipts, nothing that we produce in Kentucky is more valuable to our overall farm economy than hay.

To those who say we cannot raise and sell quality hay here in Kentucky, I simply say, look at what we've done with tobacco. Kentucky's tobacco producers are known as the world's best because they have met the challenges in the field, in the barn and in the marketplace. With this type of commitment, we can reach the same level of excellence with forages, and especially with alfalfa.