

ALFALFA FROM THE CONSUMER STANDPOINT

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Traditionally, horsemen in this part of the United States have fed grass hay mixed with good red clover hay to their horses in training as well as their horses on the farm. Knowing that legume hay is high in protein, horsemen found this a good source of the needed protein for their animals no matter what activity they were engaged in. A few problems were found with clover hay. First of all, it was usually dusty and, if not made under ideal circumstances, the hay was dark and in some cases moldy. The hay could never be purchased in a pure state; that is, it always had to be mixed with either timothy or some grass-type hay. It was very difficult to regulate the amount of protein the animal was getting because of this. For the most part, it is hard to say exactly what we were feeding the horse.

Lately, over the last several years, horsemen have realized the advantages of feeding alfalfa hay either entirely or mixed with good quality grass hay. Alfalfa can be grown by itself without having to mix in grasses. This is the way we like to buy the hay at Spendthrift. Through the use of good quality alfalfa hay we are able to regulate the protein levels that the various types of animals on the farm receive without altering the grain mixture. In other words, we can up the protein on our growing yearlings by feeding more alfalfa hay and drop the protein level on our barren mares out of the breeding season. The protein is then increased in the barren mares through the use of alfalfa hay as they get into the breeding season, so they are in a gaining condition. Alfalfa, therefore, is a great management tool on the breeding farm. Since that is the area I am most interested in and the area I am responsible for I would like to stress the great need we have for good quality alfalfa hay.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to have suppliers keep up with our demand. Spendthrift Farm presently has a horse population in excess of 430 animals. At peak season, that is mid July, we could have as many as 800 horses of all types on the farm. Since Spendthrift is limited in size we are unable to devote a part of the farm to the production of hay. This, of course, necessitates having to purchase the hay from growers primarily in the west and mid-west. Much of the alfalfa we have purchased in the past that has come from upstate Ohio has been substandard. The quality was just not there. Furthermore, we have had to pay exorbitant prices for this hay. Naturally everyone wants to get the best buy for whatever product they are consuming and we are no exception. However, our primary concern is that the quality be there, then we address ourselves to price. But, first of all, we are interested in getting good quality hay

that is free of mold and toxic plants. There has been a problem in Kansas with a blister beetle that has been found in alfalfa. We have never seen better quality hay than the alfalfa hay we have gotten out of the state of Kansas; however, we have stopped purchasing it because of the problem with the blister beetle. With the tremendous value that the thoroughbred horse represents, everything he eats has got to be of the very best quality. Dust free hay, and hay that has been made properly, with high protein levels consistently is an absolute must for those of us who are raising high quality thoroughbred horses. Our clients demand this and we aren't able to compete successfully in the market place if we don't produce a good well-grown yearling. The grain ration represents just a very small portion of the total amount of food stuff that a yearling, broodmare, or stallion consumes in a day. The greater part of his feed intake during the spring and summer months is, of course, pasture. Second to that, of course, at that time of year is hay. In the fall and winter, hay has to take over for the pasture that is no longer there. Hay requirements then go way up in the winter time. With hay being the major source of protein and digestible matter that the horse is taking in you can see how vital it is that we have good quality alfalfa hay for these animals.

The consumers, those of us who are raising horses in Central Kentucky, have a tremendous need for an outlet that can supply us with good quality alfalfa hay. Last year alone there were over 216,000 horses in the state of Kentucky. This year we will certainly have a greater number than that since over 70 new stallion prospects have been retired to the Bluegrass area alone this year. The foal crop last year in the state of Kentucky was 6,300. That number too will go up for 1982. I can assure you the demand is here for good quality alfalfa hay. We horsemen have always believed that alfalfa hay can be raised as well in Kentucky as anywhere else in the United States. However, we also believed that due to the climatic conditions, Kentucky was not a good place to grow hay because it could not be put up properly. From my discussions with Ken Evans I have learned this latter belief is inaccurate. We have received some beautiful alfalfa hay from Owen County this past year. Unfortunately, we couldn't get nearly enough. The quality was there, the protein was consistently there, we simple couldn't get the tonnage needed. On this farm alone we project that our alfalfa hay needs for 1982 will be 1,250 tons. Spendthrift is only one of over 400 farms in this area. Granted we are one of the largest, but in the total picture we are just a drop in the bucket. If Larue and Owen counties, and some other areas of Kentucky can get together and start producing good quality alfalfa hay, I can assure you there is a market for your product. Ken Evans tells me that second only to tobacco, alfalfa hay is the highest cash crop we can raise on Kentucky soil. Like everything else, it takes good management; and, I understand that the farmers, specifically in Larue and Owen counties, know how to make hay. Frankly, we are tired of having to knuckle under to hay merchants outside of the state of

Kentucky when the product we need can be raised, baled, and sold right in our home state. We are paying exorbitant prices for hay coming from the west and mid-west because of the high transportation cost. We are forced to take inferior hay from Ohio and Indiana because we simply can't get the quantity we need locally. At Spendthrift we stand 44 stallions that represent in excess of \$170 million dollars. We are raising for ourselves, as well as our clients, yearlings that will be marketed at that select Keeneland, Fasig-Tipton of Kentucky, and Saratoga sales each summer. We are seeing yearlings selling in excess of \$1 million dollars routinely. Just this last fall we sold one mare for \$1 million dollars and another for \$950,000. The million dollar mare is becoming commonplace. With these staggering figures and the tremendous value placed on thoroughbred horses, how can we continue to knuckle under to hay producers that are providing us with an inferior product, that being a low quality hay? Certainly something can be done about this. Where there is a need, there certainly has to be somebody that can supply the demand.

In summary, I would like to emphasize that the horsemen in central Kentucky have a tremendous need for high quality, clean, dust-free, non-toxic, well-made alfalfa hay. The need is great. If the farmers in the state of Kentucky can raise this kind of hay and market it at competitive prices, I feel sure they can sell every bit of it without having to go over the state line. I can assure you we will be the first ones on your list of consumers.

Thank you.