

WELCOME

to the

33rd California Alfalfa & Forage Symposium Monterey, California, 17-19 December 2003

It is with great enthusiasm that, on behalf of the planning committee, we welcome you to the 33rd California Alfalfa and Forage Symposium here in beautiful Monterey, California!

This symposium is a continuation of the venerable California Alfalfa Symposium, which began in the early 1970s and has continued as an annual event each year since, sponsored by the University of California Cooperative Extension. In recent years, we have added sessions on other forages, including corn, sudangrass and alternative forages, in recognition of their current importance in California. Corn silage is now over 300,000 acres, and the sum total of 'alternative forages' exceeds 800,000 acres! Thus, we have changed the title of the conference to the 'Alfalfa and Forage Symposium', recognizing both 'the queen' of forages and her many worthy sisters.

We begin this year's symposium with some trepidation about the future of agriculture's portion of the University of California: Cooperative Extension and the Agriculture Experiment Station. With budget cuts totaling 30% and 20% respectively, many of us wonder what the future will hold, particularly as the state faces additional severe budget limitations. However, we will do everything within our power to maintain high-quality research and outreach programs and cope as best we can in the face of these severe cuts.

This is the first time that the Alfalfa Workgroup has chosen Monterey as a symposium location. We sincerely hope, as in the past, we are able to provide information that is both useful and insightful, and that you will enjoy the coastal venue. We welcome your feedback on the value of this symposium.

The year 2002-2003 saw some of the highest acreage of alfalfa in California in several decades. At over 1.1 million acres, alfalfa has secured its spot as California's #1 acreage crop, a position it has occupied for several years (previously occupied by cotton). This acreage is the highest since the early 1980s, and represents a jump of about 15% within a short period of time (from 2001 to 2002). However, as is so often the case with field crops, this growth has not done any favors for those selling hay.

The dairy story for early-to-mid 2003 was not a particularly happy one, with depressed milk prices and soft demand, and in combination with the higher alfalfa acreage, the market situation was one of considerable frustration for many alfalfa growers this year. Those who attended the symposium in Location in 2001 and again in Reno in 2002 enjoyed the benefits of several accurate predictions by Symposium speakers about the potential nosedive in the markets, following the record high prices in 2001-2002. However, as 2003 draws to a close, there are some signs of improvement in alfalfa prospects, given the dairy, horse, export, and alternative crop projections. We'll learn more during this symposium about the forecast for 2004!

2003 presented a wealth of public issues related to alfalfa, including landmark agreements transferring water from agriculture in the Imperial Valley for urban use in San Diego. There remains a long list of public policy issues of concern to growers: regulation, workers compensation, energy costs, insurance, water politics, etc. etc. Seemingly one of the most prominent is water, both water quantity and water quality. Thus we have dedicated the morning of the first day to these broader issues of importance to the industry as a whole, with particular attention to water issues. As the state's number one agricultural user of water, there is good reason for alfalfa growers to be concerned. In the afternoon, we break out into two sessions: Pest Management and Corn and Other Forages, where you should hear about the many innovations in pest management, such as new approaches to weed-free hay and biotechnology, and new crops. On the second day, we re-convene for a main session and discuss information resources, varieties, and a range of other important topics.

We would like to express a heartfelt thanks to the many speakers who have made a tremendous effort to organize this year's excellent program. Many thanks to the sponsors and exhibitors, listed in the proceedings and in the posters, who have generously spent their time making this program economically feasible – they help pay for the coffee, break snacks and lunches. Thanks, also, to our moderators whose efforts keep the program running smoothly.

We would like to express a particular thank you to the planning committee, who has gone to extraordinary steps to assure that you have a range of speakers to address a wide variety of topics. The UC Alfalfa Workgroup planned this year's symposium, and many efforts on the part of workgroup members are greatly appreciated.

Also included this year is an *Educational Tour of the Monterey Region; Agricultural, Local, and Historical Sites* where we will visit several important areas in the Salinas Valley and Monterey Peninsula including vegetable production and processing operations, a mushroom farm, and the National Steinbeck Center, where the Nobel Prize (1962) winning author's works are themed and showcased, including Of Mice and Men where alfalfa left its literary mark in history (in this novel, based in California, the protagonists have the aspiration to own an alfalfa farm and raise rabbits)!

Welcome to the 2003 California Alfalfa and Forage Symposium!

Dan Putnam, Coordinating Chair
Shannon Mueller, Program Co-Chair