

## WEED CONTROL AND ITS EFFECT ON QUALITY HAY

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Weed control is only one of many factors involved in the production of quality alfalfa hay. Other important areas to consider are seed, water management, soil and fertility. My goal is to present some practical observations on weed control in alfalfa and its effect on the quality of the hay.

Alfalfa hay is not the only livestock feed on the market. It has to compete with everything from corn silage to bean straw. On today's market, the value or selling price of most livestock feeds is based both on supply and demand and the real nutritional value of the feed.

Feedlots and most dairies are using animal nutritionists to program the feeding of their animals. The cow of today is fed a better balanced diet than most of us.

Alfalfa is still the number one feed in California. It will be better for most of you, if this is still true five years from now. Top quality hay will help ensure this. We have the soil, climate, technology and normally the water to produce quality hay at a reasonable cost.

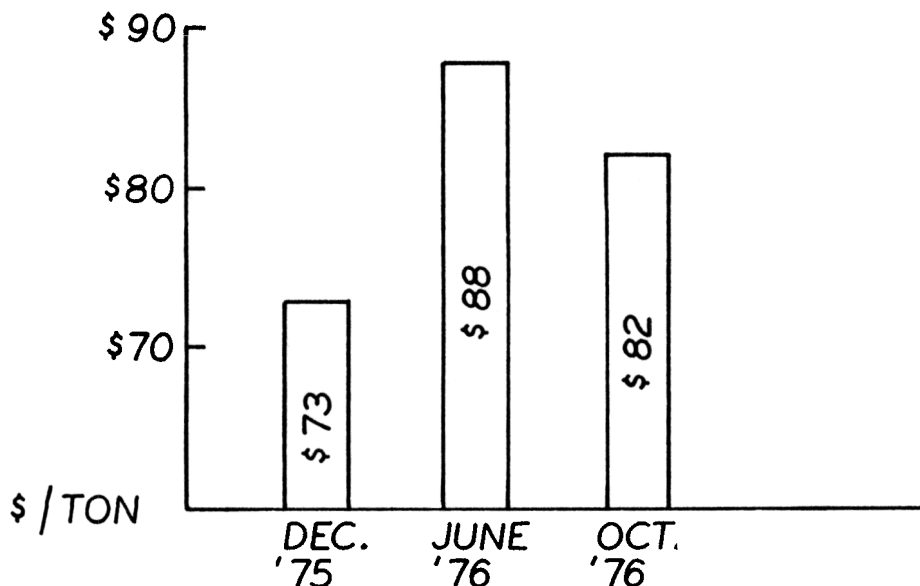
Should we equate price per ton for alfalfa with the quality of the product? Definitely. Dairymen and feedlot operators equate a ton of hay into TDN and protein at so much per unit, not just the weight of the forage for "X" dollars per ton.

Most of you already are selling your hay on a quality basis. As hay growers, you have established reputations for being producers of a certain quality of feed. Some hay growers consistently have to sell \$60 per ton hay in an \$80 per ton market because of the lower quality of hay they produce. Hay buyers don't pay top dollar for watergrass and fiddleneck. Weeds do not provide adequate nutrition for cattle.

It is not uncommon for weedy hay to contain as much as 25% grass. According to a recent advertisement in the Modesto Bee, baled watergrass had a value of \$45 per ton. It is evident the nutritional value of hay is closely related to the selling price.

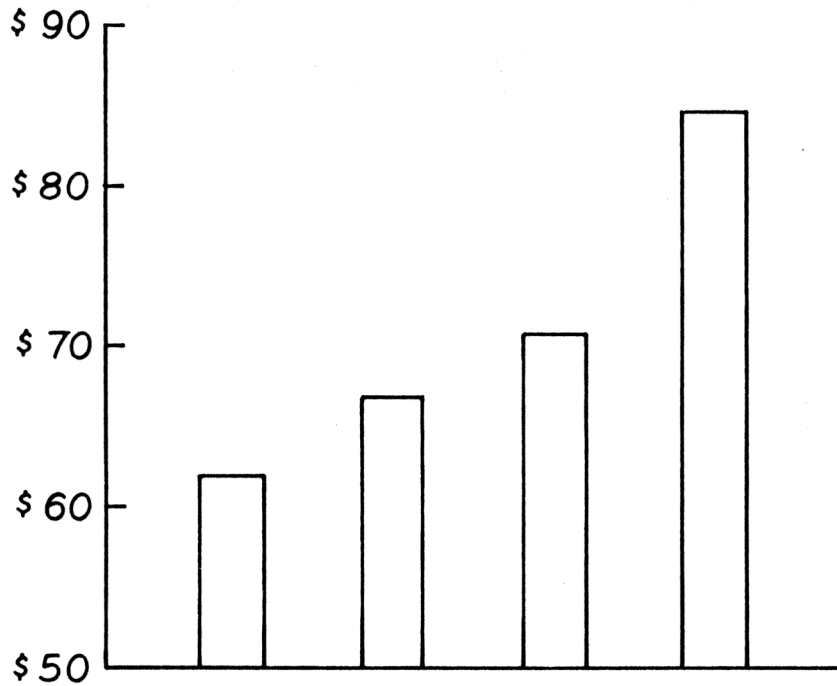
A fringe benefit of selling quality hay is that it is easier to sell. Good dairymen will borrow money to pay for quality hay. They will not buy low nutritional hay. They realize the benefits and necessity of highly nutritious hay. Selling hay is not really different from selling any other product. If your product is in demand, you will sell it faster and easier.

The following chart will give you a quick reference on the value of #2 leafy hay on the Los Angeles market for the last twelve months.



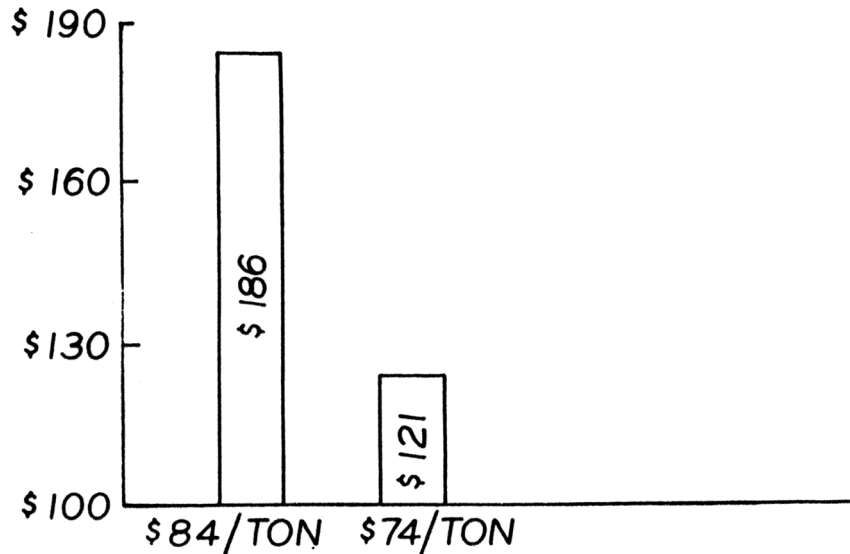
Nutritionists tell dairymen the relative values of different qualities of hay and how alfalfa hay compares in value with other available feed commodities.

The chart below shows advertised prices of alfalfa in Merced County in October 1976

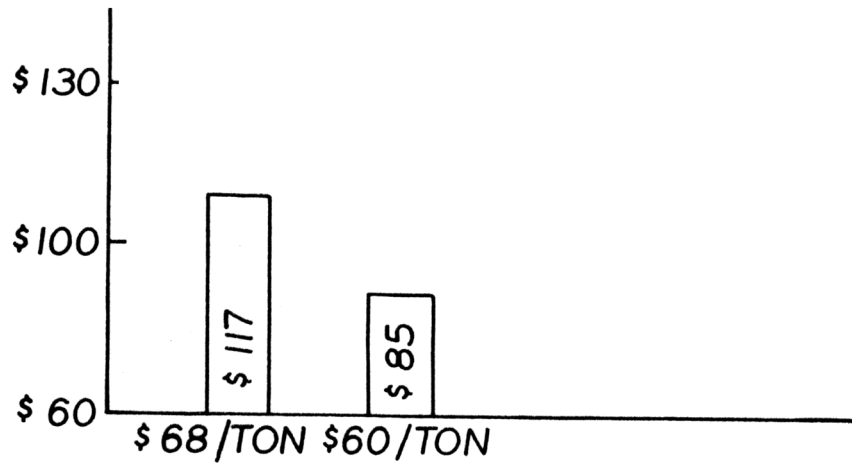


All of these prices were advertised on the same day. None of the hay was rain damaged. Weeds were responsible for most of the \$24 per ton spread in the hay prices. What is the effect of weed control on quality? In the case just cited, \$24 per ton.

On one ranch in Merced County, the projected total cost of raising weed-free alfalfa hay is about \$360 per acre with a yield of 6.5 tons per acre. The following chart projects the anticipated profit.



The following chart projects the profit on the same field by saving the \$35 per acre weed control cost.



Fifteen to forty-five dollars per acre spent on weed control can significantly effect the quality and value of alfalfa hay. The grower in the chart could reduce his production costs by \$35 per acre if he eliminated weed control. He could also reduce his stand life from four years to three years. Most of you know what it costs to establish a stand of alfalfa. Should we divide that cost into three or four years?

What does weed control do for quality? As you have seen here it can increase the value by over 30%. What does weed control cost? Other people here today are discussing specific weed programs, but costs will range from \$10 to \$50 per acre.