

DEVELOPING AND REPORTING ALFALFA PRICE INFORMATION

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The Market News Service has been reporting hay prices for over sixty years. The Hay Inspection Service had first published a Hay Market Review in January 1923 in Kansas City and Chicago. In Southern California hay prices and arrivals for such places as Hynes and Bellflower were first published in the 1920's in Los Angeles. Hay prices and arrivals for San Francisco and Petaluma were begun during this same period. During the past thirty years, hay price reporting was extended to the grower level. Information of grower sales of hay in the Imperial Valley were initially collected by the vegetable Market News reporter, later by the livestock reporter; Antelope Valley and the high desert area grower sales were collected by the Hay and Grain Market News office in Los Angeles; grower sales of hay in the Southern and Central San Joaquin Valley were collected by the Hay and Grain Market News office in Fresno; and grower sales of hay in the Northern San Joaquin Valley and Southern Sacramento Valley, as well as for the Klamath Basin were collected by the Sacramento office. Although we don't have regular contacts in Nevada, we try to collect hay sales information from people doing business in that area. Hay prices for the state of Utah are included in our reports and these are collected by the Market News reporter in North Salt Lake City. The Los Angeles edition of the Hay Market News includes grower sales of alfalfa hay in Southwestern Arizona which are collected by the county agent at Yuma.

Collecting of alfalfa price information is very interesting. Since you have to depend upon the telephone to reach your contacts, you are working together with people that you may seldom see. You hope that you can create a trust with them that you keep their information confidential and that they provide factual information. The principal source of the information is generally the dealer, since they are most frequently in the market and most readily available. Unfortunately, growers and users of hay are often difficult to locate during their busy work day, but from time to time we do try to reach them in an effort to keep our reported information valid. Understanding your contacts is important in helping to convey the cumulated thoughts of the prices and comments in reaching the printed report.

Our printed reports, from both Los Angeles and Sacramento, are scheduled for release on Mondays, although there have been occasional delays that have resulted in the reports being mailed on Tuesdays. On the Federal Market News schedule the release date for the hay reports are on Tuesdays, as the Des Moines office continues to practice, but around 15 years ago we had moved the release date for California reports to Mondays. While we may try to reach some of our contacts on various days of the week, Monday is the principal day when we quiz our sources. We try to make these calls brief, but long enough to find out how they have found the market conditions - demand, availability, trend, and prices for hay. It is from these sources upon whom we have to count on for an adequate description of the hay which is being traded.

Hay quality descriptions had long appeared on the California Hay Market News reports as comparable to U.S. grades. The Federal Hay Standards have been around for a great number of years and in a sense they are still in effect, but no one uses them. Many of you realize that the Federal Grain Inspection Service along with the American Grasslands Council had tried for several years to revise the hay standards, but there was no agreeable conclusion, and their work is in limbo. This had left the various published hay reports across the country with the continued use of differing descriptive terms for their hay sales. California was using the "Comparable to U.S. Grades", Utah was using what had been the anticipated revision to the Federal Grade Standards with the numeral grades, and other states were using an indication of the ultimate use, such as dairy hay or feeder hay. With this disorganized scheme for hay descriptions being used across the country, the climate was right for something to be done to bring together an acceptable descriptive terminology for all of Market News. About a year ago, a group of Federal and State officials met to develop a group of quality designations for alfalfa hay. Following considerable review and revision, the new quality designations were adopted by the Market News offices across the country. Here in California we are using these quality designations of Premium, Good, Fair, and Low, along with a statement of chemical analysis minimum percentages. The new

designations are quality descriptions, not standards, and the inclusion of the chemical analysis minimums are not an enforceable requirement, but an educational tool to bring the handler of hay into a better understanding of the Total Digestible Nutrient (TDN) derived through the Modified Crude Fiber (MCF) analysis, compared with the Digestible Dry Matter (DDM) derived through the Acid Detergent Fiber (ADF) method. Hopefully this might make the transition for those accustomed to the wet chemistry laboratory test to accept the near-infrared-reflectance spectroscopy (NIR) analysis when those units become properly calibrated for the California conditions.

The Market News Service publishes many reports on as many commodities. All of these reports were once sent free of charge to anyone who requested them. A few years ago budget problems began to trouble many government agencies and the Market News Service was forced to charge for their reports. One of the things which we learned was that the Hay Market News had many readers that were willing to pay for it. Hay is an important crop and there aren't too many sources for unbiased price information without turning to the Market News Service.

ALFALFA HAY QUALITY DESIGNATIONS

PREMIUM	Prebud or prebloom, low fiber with soft stems, high energy and protein content, good to high color, very good leaf attachment, mostly free of grasses and weeds, no noxious weeds, well cured.
GOOD	Prebloom to early maturity, low to medium fiber with soft stems, fairly high energy and protein content, good color, fairly good leaf attachment fairly free of grasses and weeds, no noxious weeds, well cured.
FAIR	Early to late maturity, medium to high fiber with coarse stems, low to moderate energy and protein content, fair color, fair leaf attachment, low to moderate grass and weed content, no noxious weeds, well cured.
LOW	Hay with a serious fault or faults.

In California hay reports, exceptionally high quality alfalfa hay will be reported in the narrative as "Extra Fancy". This term will not be a new hay quality designation. The price may be included in the range for "Premium" on the table if the volume is significant. "Extra Fancy" will include high testing hay or hay with other outstanding desirable qualities. This term will refer only to quality and used in the narrative or in conversation with the trade to explain prices that are higher than the general "Premium" price range. "Low" quality alfalfa hay will be reported in the narrative, but not in the table.

CHEMICAL ANALYSIS - MINIMUM PERCENTAGES

	Total Digestible Nutrient (TDN) (90% dry matter basis)	Digestible Dry Matter (DDM) (100% dry matter basis)
Premium	54	66
Good	52	64
Fair	49	61