

## Problems That Affect Buying & Selling Alfalfa

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Buying and selling hay is a highly technical business with many pitfalls and risks. Changes in feeding and harvesting practices (Green Bagging) affect marketing practices unfamiliar to many buyers and sellers in today's market. Approximately 75% of California hay production goes to discriminating buyers in the dairy industry searching for high quality forage for their needs. Typical buyers complaints are as follows:

Too dry	Too hard	Too ropy
Too old	Too much bloom	Too wet
Musty	Too stemmy	Too much red leaf
Too much bleach	Cows won't eat	Doesn't smell good
Doesn't taste good		

What then is the Criterion growers should follow in producing the type of hay this dairy market wants and is willing in most cases to pay the higher asking price?

Cut 28 days or less	Bale with adequate moisture
Good leaf retention	Maintain good color
Use twine ties	Fertilize for quality & yield
Softness	Good Smell
Plant High Quality Seed	Bale at 125/130 lbs. per bale

The grower has to irrigate his crop twice per cutting to achieve maximum yield and schedule his irrigation between cuttings so as not to allow his crop to bloom, maintain quality and store energy for the next cutting. Sometimes a pretty difficult task. Most growers are aware of what is needed to produce high quality dairy feed if Mother Nature cooperates. Many dairymen however are not aware of the problems growers have controlling insects and maintaining yield and quality.

What happens to the other 25% of the hay produced in California?

Approximately 75%	Dairy
Approximately 09%	Export
Approximately 10%	Horses
Approximately 06%	Cattle and Sheep

Horse hay must be in the following category:

Good Color  
Good Leaf retention  
Free of Mold  
Medium Stem

Cattle hay is a mixture of all other types sometimes accidentally damaged by weather, poor management practices or other factors which contribute to the production of lower quality hay.

Sheep quality must be fine stem, have good color, be free of mold, and be high in protein.

Export hay competes with good quality Feed Store or Horse hay. It must have good color, no wheat or barley straw, medium protein and no *Hordeum* spp. (Wild Barley)!!!!

What happens when a buyer begins feeding a lot of hay he just purchased and production drops or the cows won't eat it?

1. Call the Seller or Buyer
2. Call the Feed Company
3. Re-negotiate the delivery by discounting or replacing.

Buyers and sellers must know the proper procedures for sampling hay with proper equipment. In too many cases hay is resampled with a different apparatus which may distort results from the previous sample. The new sample should be submitted to the same laboratory for analysis. Most Labs keep a shelf sample for 30 days. This sample may be rerun to check for the possibility of an error occurring in the Lab. It is virtually impossible to obtain a new core sample and expect the results to be stated exactly as in the previous sample.

Good communication, trust and understanding are key elements in buying and selling hay. Growers and buyers must feel confident their broker well not falsely understate or overstate the quality and price being negotiated.