

## **FINDING A MARKET NICHE THAT WORKS FOR YOU**

**by Doug Canadas<sup>1</sup>**

Alfalfa is just part of our total farming operation. We farm 1000 acres total, including sugar beets, wheat, oats, silage corn and alfalfa. Until this fall we had 450 acres in alfalfa but have just planted an additional 240 acres.

This year we contracted 11,000 tons of alfalfa haylage to local dairy producers. One hundred percent of our alfalfa is now going to the silage pit. We also produced an additional 2,500 tons of haylage off of leased ground.

We maintain a cutting schedule of approximately 30 days throughout the growing season and take 6 cuttings. Fields are cut 6 to 7 days following an irrigation to minimize soil compaction and crown damage. We use a Case-IH double windrow attachment on the swather. This eliminates the need for a man and a machine to rake the fields. A gandy box mounted on the chopper applies approximately .75 lbs/ton of preservative to the forage. The forage is usually sufficiently wilted 8 hours following swathing for the chopper to it up. The swather and chopper run close enough to each other that if breakdowns occur, loss of forage is minimized.

Almost all the haylage is packed in to silage bunkers which we lease. We only deliver freshly harvested haylage directly to a pit on one dairy. We pack and cover the bunkers and assume the losses due to shrink. We have been careful in our packing and hauling of the haylage so our losses don't usually exceed 5%. Everything is weighed in and out of the pit. The TDN of our haylage runs about 54-55 at 90% dry matter through the year.

We make daily deliveries of 32 tons of haylage to four dairy producers. This works out to approximately 20 lbs/cow/day. We have 2 or 3 more producers who want to get our haylage delivered. The extra acreage we planted this fall should provide us with enough haylage to meet the added demand.

We charge for the delivered haylage at \$1.00 per unit of dry matter. This usually works out to \$38 or \$39.00 per ton. This covers our expenses at a rate close to what we would be paid for custom forage harvesting. The rates work out to be very reasonable considering we are able to deliver a high quality forage on a consistent basis to our customers. We are able to bill on a monthly basis, which not only insures a steady cash flow for us, but decreases the amount of money the dairy producers need to tie up in forage production or purchase costs.

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<sup>1</sup>Canadas Farms, Rt. 1, Box 1576, Orland, California, 95963.