

CALIFORNIA ALFALFA & FORAGE ASSOCIATION

Tom Ellis¹

ABSTRACT

The California Alfalfa and Forage Association was formed in 1997 in response to the growing need of one of California's largest commodities to 'Stand Up and Be Heard'. The organization's goals are to educate the public, legislators, and government agencies about the economic and environmental benefits of alfalfa and forages in California as a non-profit association. To date, the Association has approximately 220 volunteer members, a Steering Committee, an Executive Director, final draft Bylaws, a new web-site and excellent prospects for continued growth. Our first annual meeting will be held Dec 3, 1998 at the Reno Hilton in Reno, Nevada.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR GROWTH

Last year at the California Alfalfa Symposium, Jim Kuhn, a grower from the Imperial Valley, made a proposal for the formation of an organization to address the challenges facing the alfalfa and forage industries in California. He pointed out that forages, taken as a whole, represent the number one use of land in our state. In fact, recent California Department of Food and Agriculture statistics show that the 1997 hay crop topped the \$1 billion threshold, making hay the State's number one field crop. Forages support our dynamic dairy industry, our livestock and equine industry, and make a positive contribution to the U.S. trade balance through a significant volume of exported forage products.

However, the industry faces many challenges, including water availability, pest control, and regulatory issues, to mention a few. In response to Jim's proposal, a voluntary organization has been established with the support of the California Farm Bureau's Hay Advisory Committee, the California Farm Bureau Federation, and the Alfalfa Workgroup. The organization is called the California Alfalfa and Forage Association (CAFA) and has been functioning under the guidance of a steering committee set up last January. The committee has met almost monthly, filing Articles of Incorporation with the State and completing the Association By-Laws to be presented at its first annual meeting to be held in conjunction with the Symposium. Following the adoption of the By-Laws and the formation of the Board of Directors, we will obtain non-profit status thus completing the legal requirements for establishing the organization. Also, in September we obtained, on an interim basis, the services of Stacey Roberts as our Executive Director. We are now prepared to move forward to address the challenges we face and dispel the myth that hay and forage are low value crops that use too much water and are a wasteful use of land.

The Association supports the U.C. Alfalfa Workgroup's *Alfalfa & Forage Review* and we have used the 'Review' to attract and solicit membership. This excellent new publication by the Workgroup will be published quarterly and is one of the benefits of membership. The first two

¹T. Ellis, Grower, Grimes, CA; Published In: Proceedings, CA/NV Alfalfa Symposium, 3-4 December, 1998, Reno, NV, UC Cooperative Extension, University of California, Davis.

issues contained a lot of information regarding the formation and objectives of CAFA and included applications for membership. To date we have over 200 members, but, to be effective, we need the support of all growers and suppliers. Remember, membership is voluntary and dues are required on an annual basis to fund the continuing operation of the Association. We realize this has been a difficult year for hay producers and the idea of dues may be difficult to accept, but we must invest a little money and effort if the organization is to accomplish its mission of educating the public, legislators and other organizations about the importance of alfalfa in the California economy and the environment.

The Steering Committee has worked very hard to get the Association off the ground—now we are ready to move forward. Our Steering Committee and Executive Director have many good ideas of how we can accomplish our goals, but the first is to produce a pamphlet to point out the importance of alfalfa and forages to the state's economy, the need for these crops in the cropping rotations, and the many benefits they have for the environment and wildlife. This publication will be designed for distribution to government agencies, the news media and as educational background material. Another pamphlet has been developed for membership solicitation. A web site has been established (www.CalHay.org) with information about alfalfa and forages, the benefits and history of forages, and CAFA. Our Executive Director has been interacting with the California Farm Bureau and the Western States FQPA Coalition regarding the impacts of the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA). She has been searching for appropriate grants relating to offsetting the implementation and impacts of FQPA—this Act has very serious ramifications for our industry. As you can see, there is much work to be done and we need your support so we can carry on.

Therefore, we urge you to become a part of this movement by filling out a membership application that will be available at the Symposium. If you have any ideas about how this organization can help the industry, please let us know. Participate and help us to improve the long range viability of our industry.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT

THE CALIFORNIA ALFALFA AND FORAGE ASSOCIATION:

Visit Our Table at the Symposium

Visit Our Members at Our Annual Meeting, December 3rd at the Reno Hilton

Visit Our Web-site at www.CalHay.org