

Reasons for Optimism

by John Kugler

WSU Extension Agent

If positives in the dairy and livestock industries are any indication, the domestic hay market may become more active in the next few weeks and months.

While many haystacks dot the landscape of the Columbia Basin – some tarped as they are either sold or growers expect them to be there for a while – close attention is being paid to dairy and livestock activity.

Farm milk prices continue to strengthen as a result of tightened late summer cheese markets. However, the USDA's "Electronic Outlook Report" from the Economic Research Service does not expect average 2004 milk prices to exceed average 2003 prices until late in the year. Factors that cloud the future include the new dairy buyout. Cow numbers may decrease as some cows are slaughtered, while others may go for expansion of the stronger dairies.

Although large, the Pacific Northwest's 2003 alfalfa crop has had very little rain damage. Higher than normal heat during July and August has hurt forage quality some, but fourth and fifth cutting has been relatively rain-free and should produce a good supply of premium and supreme class hay, which is in demand.

The brightest spot for hay growers may be in the beef market. Beef prices have soared to record highs during August and September. This is in part due to the ban on imports of Canadian beef and cattle to the U.S and world markets since May 20 when a single cow was found to have BSE.

Demand has remained strong both domestically and internationally for beef. Combine this demand for beef and the effect of drought throughout the western U.S., and the Pacific Northwest may be the prime source for high quality feeder hay. Western Washington remains dry with little grazing or haying forage available. The USDA/ERS outlook states "all sectors of the cattle industry are profitable at present." Furthermore, the re-entry of younger (under 30 months) boneless Canadian beef is likely to be absorbed quickly, thus prices may soften for a short time, but then are expected to remain at near present levels through much of 2004.

Hay growers typically leave stacks of lower and medium quality hay uncovered during winter storage. The 90-day prediction by NOAA for precipitation in the Pacific Northwest calls for normal rainfall, with above average accumulation for extreme eastern Washington, northern Idaho and western Montana. Thus, it might be wise to invest in covering haystacks this fall as we have had minimal rain damage to date.

New Way to Market Hay

The WSHGA website has a "Hay for Sale" section available to members.

For less than the cost of a classified newspaper advertisement, you can have as many listing as you want and can identify grade, packaging, tonnage, preferred market, storage means and other details. The listing is similar in format to the printed directory, but includes more classifications.

Log on to www.wa-hay.org to see current listings and post your hay for sale. The service costs just \$50 a year for WSHGA members. The information you submit will be posted weekly (it won't show up instantly as we need to verify membership info before posting). Press releases announcing this valuable resource have been issued to the media and various buyer markets throughout the Northwest.

Don't wait for buyers to find you, post your hay for sale on the website, and reap the benefits of the far-reaching Internet. It might help to move a few tons in a slow marketing year!

USDA Washington-Oregon (Columbia Basin) Weekly Hay Report: October 24, 2003

Source - USDA Market News

Tonnage: 15,688 Week Ago: 19,750 Year Ago: 13,400

Compared to last week, Premium and Supreme Alfalfa mostly steady in a light test. Demand light to moderate with light to moderate supplies. Limited buyer interest this past week on export or domestic hays. Fair to Good Alfalfa mostly steady also with moderate to heavy supplies. Retail/feed/horse hay sales mostly steady on all classes.

Quality/Bale Size	Tons	Price	Wtd Avg	Comment
Export Alfalfa sales to move in 60 days unless noted:				
Premium 3 tie 800	85.00	85.00		
Premium mid/ton	1,320	85.00-90.00	85.23	Cubing/Slicing
Good mid/ton 1,000	75.00	75.00		Slicing
Good mid/ton 5,800	70.00	70.00		Cubing

Alfalfa, domestic sales:

Premium 2-3 tie	330	90.00-95.00	90.45
Prem midsize/ton	3,010	85.00-95.00	87.43
Fair midsize/ton	1,700	55.00	55.00

2003 Benton Franklin Hay King Contest

by Tim Woodward

WSU

John Long of Pasco was awarded Hay King honors at this year's Benton Franklin Fair and Rodeo.

Long's total score was 184.8 and his relative feed value was 190.5. Dan Petty was second with a total score of 183.2 and a RFV of 199, while Terry Bailie and Caleb Mahler tied for third with a total score of 182. Nine of the entries were classified as Supreme hay with two placed in the Premium category.

The purpose of the annual contest is to demonstrate the skills of the grower to put up excellent quality hay. The exhibitors compete on a state level by bringing three conventional bales for exhibit at the fair, to be sold toward the end of the event.

Special cash award prizes are derived for the proceeds of the sale of the donated hay which are sold during the 4-H and FFA Market Stock Sale. The Market Stock Committee for youth projects on the grounds uses any funds left over after the cash awards have been presented.

The winner of the contest is designated Benton Franklin County Alfalfa Hay King and receives a revolving trophy sponsored by the Greater Pasco Chamber of Commerce. If named Benton Franklin County Hay King for any three years, the revolving trophy remains in the winner's possession.

The hay is judged both visually and in the laboratory. Core samples are taken to determine crude protein, acid detergent fiber, neutral detergent fibers and moisture as well as some other characteristics.

Dr. Steve Fransen, a forage specialist with WSU at Prosser, conducted this year visual judging. He considered hay color, foreign matter, weed content, bale ties, dust and mold, shape of bale, as well as other traits of the bale. Visual grading and laboratory analysis were combined to determine the winner. The maximum allowed lab score for RFV is 180 and it is interesting that this year's entrants were all over the 180 RFV cutoff. Therefore, the visual score determined the winner. It also demonstrates the ability for the Washington grower to produce and package the best hay in the US. In fact Washington is the leader in the US for milk produced per cow. This fact supports the excellent hay produced in the area.

Grant County Fair Hay King Crowned

by John Kugler

WSU Extension Agent

“Oh, the wonderful aroma of sweet hay!”

Comments such as this spoken by passersby of the Hay King Tent at the 2003 Grant County Fair marked a successful demonstration of the county's exceptional hay products. This year's contest drew entries in all classes of hay, which include domestic and export quality alfalfa, timothy, orchardgrass and mixed grass/legume.

Dan Herring, crowned the 2003 Hay King, farms in the George area of Grant County. His 1,300-pound entry marks the second time in recent history that a big bale won the Hay

King award. Second place in Domestic Alfalfa went to Duane Hubbard of Quincy. His 2-tie alfalfa bale was scored less than one percentage point behind first place. Third, fourth, and fifth place winners were Bob Wieldraayer of Royal City, Sid Sackmann of Moses Lake, and Chuck Sandman of Moses Lake respectively. In fact, all entries of alfalfa were of exceptional physical and nutritional quality and ranked very close together.

Betes Farms of Moses Lake brought in the best Export Alfalfa entry, followed by Keith Rupprecht of Warden and Paul Glasco of Moses Lake.

The Export Grass Class was won by Tim Ray of Soap Lake with a 2-tie timothy entry. The second place entry, a 2-tie sample of orchardgrass hay was brought in by Bob Wieldraayer of Royal Slope. The Domestic Grass class was won by Duane Hubbard's orchardgrass entry. Second and third place winners were Sid Sackmann of Moses Lake and Bob Wieldraayer of Royal City.

In the Grass/Legume Mixed Hay class, Sid Sackmann entered the winning hay followed by Bob Wieldraayer and Duane Hubbard.

Visitors to the Hay King Tent also enjoyed colorful and informative poster displays highlighting haymaking history and machinery innovations enabling today's high efficiency industry.

The Secret to High Quality Big Bales

2003 Grant County Hay King Dan Herring, his wife Robin and teenage children Travis and Amanda farm over 2,000 acres in the Quincy area – 1,100 of which are in hay and the rest rotational crops such as corn, mint, beans and potatoes. The Herrings also have a 10- acre sweet cherry orchard managed by 19 year-old Travis.

They manage their fieldwork with only two hired employees. Dan and Travis do most of the haymaking.

They have farmed about 20 years in the George area. Dan worked for ten years as a crop consultant while farming on the side, during which time he gained valuable experience with a variety of production problems.

According to Dan, the secret to putting up high quality big bales is to bale at the proper moisture; that is, at the point just below being too moist.

Dan's winning alfalfa entry, a 1,300-pound 3X4 big bale, was of second cutting in a field in its second year of production. The variety is a branded alfalfa from FirstLine Seeds of Moses Lake.

Beware of Credit Risk Buyers

Members of the Washington State Hay Growers Association have asked about the possibility of obtaining a list of buyers who are considered poor credit risks.

Several years ago, the Attorney General ruled such a list cannot by law be printed. This topic has come up again due to recent buyer bankruptcies. The Board is well aware of this problem, as is the State Department of Agriculture. The state will investigate incidents of non-payment if they receive such information from the grower involved.

To avoid problems, growers are advised to keep accurate records of dates, times, and locations and the type and amount of hay sold. Also, it is advised to keep track of truck license numbers.

Bob Radke, Commission Merchant Program Investigations Supervisor at WSDA, can be reached at 509-225-2616.

Hay Growers Award Scholarship to Ephrata Student

A \$200 scholarship has been awarded to Ephrata High School senior Turrel Smith by the Washington State Hay Growers Association.

The scholarship came about as WSU Extension Agent John Kugler needed a plot sprayer built for herbicide research studies. Kugler contacted Ephrata High School Metals Projects instructor Darrel Neill to see if a student needed a project for the class. Mr. Neill took little time in suggesting Smith for the job.

“Turrel has a natural gift for building things with metal,” Neill said.

Smith accepted the challenge and went to work during regular class time. Through a WSHGA research grant, Kugler supplied the materials, drew a sketch and provided photos of other plot sprayers. The sprayer was fabricated and ready for use in early June.

In appreciation for his service, the WSHGA Board of Directors awarded Smith the scholarship to help with his continuing education. He plans on majoring in Aviation Maintenance at Big Bend Community College in the fall.