

## Crude protein is alfalfa's bottom line

DEKALB, II. — Although numerous factors, affect the selection of an alfalfa variety, the bottom line in any hay production program is that crop's crude protein content and value as a livestock feedstuff.

According to Greg Jones, DeKalb-Pfizer Genetics regional agronomist, alfalfa hay quality is of ever-increasing importance at hay auctions across the country. At specially advertised auctions in dairy states, each lot of hay is analyzed on site via a mobile laboratory unit using special infrared radiation techniques.

Within minutes analytical results are ready for computer analysis and the amount of protein, phosphorus, potassium, calcium and other ingredients can be calculated. An assessment of a lot's relative feed value also can be determined and the results are made available to prospective bidders before the auction begins.

The program was developed especially for dairymen and other producers intent on improving the efficiency of their livestock production programs. Infrared testing allows producers to buy hay on the basis of feed value rather than just buying what looks good to the human eye. The data also takes the guesswork out of balancing feed rations.

Hay values tend to fluctuate seasonally depending on overall supply. Infrared testing expands this traditional hay pricing structure to include a consideration of crude protein content and relative feed value. For example, a lot of alfalfa with a crude protein content of 20.5 percent recently brought \$145 a

ton, while a lot with a protein level of 10.0 percent sold for just \$75 a ton.

Jones says on site infrared testing is becoming very popular at hay auctions throughout much of the alfalfa region. He emphasizes that both buyer and seller benefit and says the program encourages good management for quality production.

Producers should select an alfalfa variety with the potential to produce a fine-stemmed, leafy plant that recovers quickly under intensive cutting schedules, Jones says. He notes that crude protein levels, relative feed value and high yields correlate directly with such qualities.

Jones says proper management is essential to producing top quality alfalfa hay. He notes that crude protein content and relative feed value decrease as alfalfa plants grow older. As a plant matures cell solubles are converted to insoluble components and plants become more fibrous, decreasing digestibility and relative feed value. Jones recommends cutting alfalfa in the late bud to early bloom stage and says fertility practices should be based on production goals and current soil test information.

Producers who use superior alfalfa varieties combined with intensive management can increase economic gains significantly over lesser-producing varieties grown under similar management. For example, in a recent test conducted by the Lafayette County, Wisconsin Forage Council, DeKalb Brand 120 produced 7,676 pounds of dry matter in three cuttings. Crude

protein content averaged 22.5 percent.

In economic terms, the DeKalb Brand 120 produced \$461 worth of crude protein per acre based on the price of 44 percent soybean oil meal at \$240 per ton. This was as much as \$200 per acre more than lesser-producing varieties in the test. In a typical four-year rotation, producers could increase their economic gains nearly \$800 over lesser-producing varieties that may have initially cost less per pound of seed.



"U.S. farmers are an efficient group, but they don't necessarily know how to market their product," remarked commodity specialist, Gregory C. Strausbaugh during Merrill Lynch's seminar held at Lancaster's Treadway Resort Inn on May 2.

Speaking at length on hedging strategies as applied to hog futures, Strausbaugh emphasized that, in light of today's high operating costs and narrower profit margins, the practice of hedging becomes an insurance policy on the farmer's investment.

The largest commodity futures broker in the world, Merrill Lynch is represented through 105 memberships on 46 commodity futures exchanges around the world.

### Farm Credit appointment

BALTIMORE — The Farm Credit Banks of Baltimore, the region's leading agricultural lending institution, has announced the addition of Eugene (Tom) Poturalski as Management Development Specialist in the Training Section of the Banks' Association Services Department.

In the newly created position, Poturalski will be responsible for

designing, organizing, and conducting training and education programs for staff supervisory and management development.

The Baltimore native received his bachelor's degree in Industrial Management from the University of Maryland. Prior to joining the Banks, he served as Training Supervisor - Management & Employee Development for FMC Corporation in Baltimore.

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