

# Putting hay to the test

## Performance testing means quality forage, says extension agent

BY GINGER SECRIST MYERS  
Staff Correspondent

**HARRISBURG** — Is there a viable market for performance tested hay in southeast Pennsylvania? Dauphin County Assistant Extension Agent Bruce Kreider is confident that such a market exists and asserts, "We've got a quality product and we can afford to transport it."

Kreider believes so strongly in this area's hay marketing potential that he has established a performance tested hay directory which lists tested hay lots for sale. (The report appears weekly in Lancaster Farming under the advertisement heading of "The Haystack.") Kreider explains the need for such a listing by noting that this area has several channels for marketing hay, including auctions and dealers. However, he thinks some of these channels don't work, since the hay is often sold for less than its feed value.

The objective of the directory is to improve the quality of forages that are being marketed. "We're not looking to supplant existing markets, but we are trying to introduce new marketing trends. Right now the market rewards you for color, but what does it get you if it's made right too?" he said. "We're trying to get rewards for those who are making it correctly as well as making it pretty."

While the project has the support of several forage groups and local small farmers in Adams, Chester, Dauphin and Lehigh Counties, responses to the ads have been sparse. Dairymen are the targeted

market group, Kreider explains, and although the best quality hay sells quickly, the middle and lower testing samples are receiving few inquiries.

Kreider hopes hay producers will be encouraged by what sells and improve the quality of the samples they have tested for future listings.

Kreider's office is largely responsible for the program with some assistance from Extension agents in other counties involved. The hay seller arranges to have Kreider sample the hay, and the samples are sent to the University for testing. All testing costs are paid for by state-funded small farm project funds for farms grossing less than \$50,000 annually.

Kreider inspects the hay and completes a hay description sheet, which lists species, cutting, bale size, color, leaf to stem ratio, drying aid used, preservatives used, and the applicant's name, address and phone number.

When he receives the results, Kreider meets with the producer to discuss his hay quality and the possibility of listing it for sale in "The Haystack." All advertising in the directory is also covered by project funds.

The hay will then be listed according to species, location, seller's phone number, percentage protein, Total Digestible Nutrients, Relative Feed Value, and calcium and phosphorus content.

Kreider prefers the Wisconsin formula for Relative Feed Value.

In this formula, Relative Feed Value uses two fiber measurements to estimate digestibility and animal consumption of the forage. Hay with a RFV of 100 would be an "average" hay in terms of animal performance.

"The Haystack" does not list a selling price; it is aimed at getting the buyer and seller together over a known tested lot of hay.

Kreider stresses that the marketing technique has played an educational role in his area as well. It has provided him with a forum to present more information to producers on how quality hay performs, how to make good hay, and how to cut losses when making hay.

One producer who has been interested in the project since its conception is Casper Kohler. His 60-acre farm sets on the edge of the urban sprawl of the city. He makes about 200 tons of alfalfa hay annually and sells it all through the auctions.

Kreider terms Kohler "one of those guys who can make hay right." Kohler, a retired postal worker, does all the labor himself, including stacking his hay on pallets in his 99x48-foot building. Because of limited labor, Kohler never cuts more than he thinks he can handle without trouble.

Kreider tested Kohler's hay by cuttings this past year. His third cutting alfalfa tested at 22 percent crude protein and had a Relative Feed Value of 145. He uses both a drying aid and a preservative when needed.

Kohler reports that through the auctions this year he has received between \$50 and \$120 for his hay. When asked his opinion on the success of the performance tested hay directory, he replies, "I think it's a good thing, but I'm not sure the farmers are ready to accept it. I got calls on my hay, but they were all from people away from here and they didn't like the price. I'm not sure how to set price by my test."

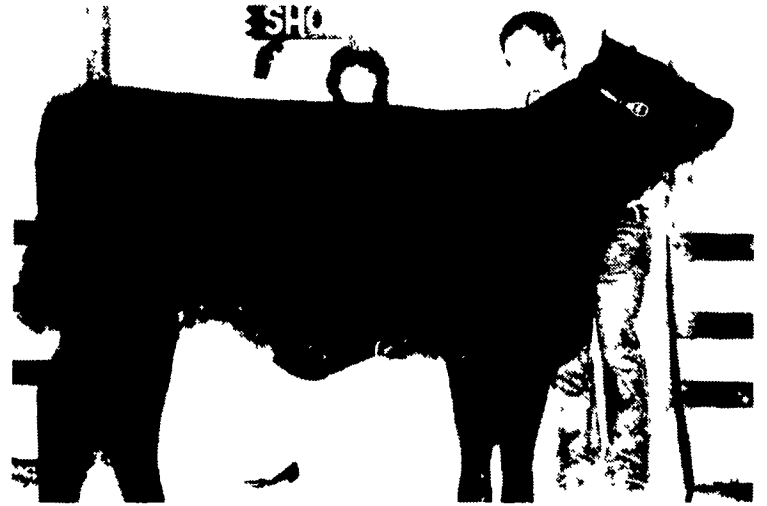
Kreider admits pricing is a paradox. The known test value is of advantage to dairymen, yet it is the horsemen who can afford to buy off the best hays, both RFV

and cosmetically.

Eventually, Kreider says, he envisions the possibility for a brokerage or clearing house for the hay markets in this area. The broker would collect the data and test samples on the hays available and then serve as the contact between prospective seller and buyer.

Kreider would also like to see the formation of a state hay marketing association. He is enthusiastic about marketing performance tested hay and sees "The Haystack" and the support he has received from producers as steps in the right direction.

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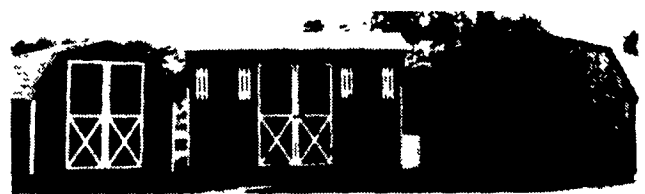
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