Foraging Around

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Hay As A Cash Crop

During the past several weeks, as a result of the drought that plagued the south last summer, no agricultural commodity has received more attention in the press than hay. Hay, that often neglected second cousin farm crop, moved into the south by truckloads and trainloads - thousands and thousands of tons of hay from all over the U.S. to feed starving livestock that otherwise may have been lost. And, certainly, Pennsylvania hay producers played a big role in making their hay available for this purpose.

Big Business

Hopefully as a result of this catastrophy someone has gotten the message. Hay is the one forage crop that can be transported from one area to another. And hay is big business. In 1985, for example, the nation's hay producers harvested nearly 150 million tons of hay from over 60 million acres. Its value - nearly $11 billion.

And today hay, especially alfalfa hay, is potentially one of the best cash crops availble on many northeastern farms.

How Hay is Sold

New methods of marketing hay have made selling hay easier, too. Visual inspection, to be sure, is still the most common method of assessing quality and price when either selling or buying. But the development of new rapid methods of measuring quality such as Near Infrared Reflectance Spectroscopy (NIRS) is sure to have a major impact on marketing hay in the year ahead.

Hay dealers or brokers, of course, are still major suppliers. In some areas more hay is being marketed through co-ops. And in several states special computer assisted marketing systems designed to help growers find buyers and to help buyers locate hay, have been developed.

But the big increase in marketing hay in many areas is through hay auctions. Originally, as was and still is true for Pennsylvania hay auctions, this method simply brought together the producer with loads of hay, an auctioneer, and a group of prospective buyers. Hay was sold by visual inspection and the price determined by supply and demand.

Quality Tested Hay Auctions

But in Wisconsin and Minnesota, where hay auctions are relatively recent, a new approach is being used. And it has come about because of the introduction of NIRS equipment, usually in mobile units, as a rapid method of measuring hay quality prior to sale, plus the grading of hay according to the results. Wisconsin forage specialist Dwayne Rohweder calls these "quality tested hay auctions" and, according to Rohweder, this new approach means "Wisconsin hay producers may finally be getting paid for quality in the cash market."

The hay grading system used in Wisconsin and Minnesota auctions is a revision of the one proposed by the American Forage and Grassland Council several years ago. It includes a new term, relative feed value (RFU), which is a value developed from acid detergent fiber (ADF) and neutral detergent fiber (NDF) tests and compares one forage to another based on feed value and predicted intake.

National Alfalfa Hay Quality Standards

Another recent development in hay marketing was the development of national alfalfa hay quality standards, their intent: to have uniform testing throughout the U.S. so both seller and buyer can receive accurate and interpretable results on any given lot of hay.

Obviously for these standards to work standardized procedures for sampling and testing hays are a must. And standardized procedures have been developed by a National Alfalfa Hay Quality Committee. A voluntary laboratory certification program operated by the National Alfalfa Hay Test Association in conjunction with AFGC and the National Hay Association is also in place.

Not all of the problems have been solved. But progress has been made in hay marketing, and with continued efforts on the part of many individuals and organizations hay will eventually receive the attention it deserves in the market place.

Agway Board Names Top Officers

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Three top officers were elected by the 18-member board of directors of Agway Inc. October 24, immediately following the farm cooperative's 22nd Annual Meeting in Syracuse, NY.

Re-elected were Richard Croner, Berlin, PA, chairman of the board and William A. Hiller, Fayetteville, NY, president and chief executive officer. Elected vice chairman was Ralph H. Heffner of Pine Grove, PA.

Croner, a graduate of The Pennsylvania State University, operates a dairy and crop farm in partnership with his son. He has served as Agway chairman since 1982 and member of the Agway board since 1964.

Richard Croner, board chairman, Agway, Inc.

William A. Hiller, president and chief executive officer, Agway, Inc.

Heffner and his family operate a dairy and fruit farm. A member of the Agway Board since 1973, he is also a graduate of The Pennsylvania State University.

William A. Hiller, re-elected president and chief executive officer, was first named to the post on July 1, 1981. He joined Agway in 1951 and has held managerial positions throughout the cooperative. As Agway's top management officer, he heads a system reporting consolidated sales of $3.5 billion in fiscal 1985-86.

A native of Stroudsburg, PA, Hiller graduated cum laude from Upper Iowa University and holds a master of science degree in agricultural economics from The Pennsylvania State University.

Two new directors and four incumbents were elected to three-year terms on the 18-member Agway board of directors. Reelected were: Burton F. Inglis, Clifton Springs, NY; Stephen P. James, Middlebury, Vt.; John H. Ross, Lowville, NY, and John H. Talmage, Riverhead, NY.

Elected to their first term were: Charles C. Brosius of West Grove, PA, and Thomas E. Smith of Greenville, PA. They succeed George Steele and Raymond Sperry who both chose to retire from the Agway board.

Agway Inc. is a farm supply and food marketing cooperative owned by 101,000 member stockholders in 12 northeastern states. Its headquarters are in Syracuse, NY.

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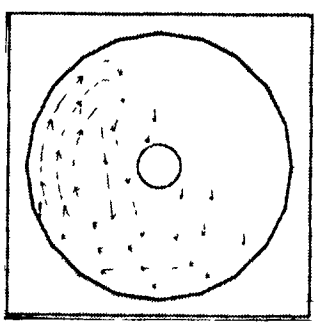

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