

Award-Winning Alfalfa Producer

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up to Heidel Hollow's standards. The less-than-ideal growing conditions also put a dent in sales — about 4,000 tons last year, according to Fink. This year, he said, he'd like to market 5,000 tons or better.

In contrast to the beginning of the year, which was simply too wet and cool for too long, Fink, like many farmers, got off to a slow start in planting. "We were two weeks behind," he said. "Everything got two weeks behind."

The delay won't affect the third cutting, but possibly some fourth cuttings, according to the farmer.

Manage 1,000 acres

The Finks — David, his father Orrin, David's wife Sonia, and sons Travis, 19 and Michael, 15, in addition to neighbor Richard Bachman — manage 1,000 acres in the rolling hills of northwestern Lehigh County. The farm, Heidel Hollow, took its name from Heidelberg Township, where they

are based, and the natural hollow in the hills where the farmstead sits. The area was first farmed by Fink's great-grandmother's uncle, a Hunsicker. The farm was named by Glenn Ellenberger, a former county extension agent.

Six hundred acres remain in alfalfa, mixes, and timothy. The remaining 400 are rotated with corn and oats to get them ready for alfalfa. This year, about 160 acres of new alfalfa (about 80 acres of pure and the rest mixes and timothy) were started using several commercial varieties.

According to the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council newsletter, Fink usually keeps an alfalfa stand for three to four years. Fields are limed and fertilized using nutrients in the chicken manure according to soil test recommendations prior to seeding. The first cut is taken early in the spring and subsequent cuttings are taken frequently enough to allow three to four harvests per year.

According to the Certified Alfalfa Council, Fink's alfalfa production has averaged more than four tons per acres for several years. The hay is cut with a drying agent applied and baled with a preservative.

The hay is square-baled and accumulated in piles in a field. A hay rack is used to arrange and stack 10 bales per row, seven rows high, on six-foot by 8-foot pallets. The bales are dried using heated, forced air (about 20 percent of the hay is heat dried, or about 100 tons per week) and stacked on pallets in the warehouse until shipped.

Some bales, which measure 14 inches by 18 inches by 22 inches, are "compressed" to more than twice their density using a hay compressor machine and warehoused. About 620 bales are made to store in a 40-foot ocean container. (Fink said it is volume, not weight, that makes up overseas shipping charges.)

Raises layers

The haymaking operation was started by Fink, a Delaware Valley College graduate, in 1973. But the farm has remained a poultry and potato operation since he grew up there.

The farm also raises about 38,000 layers, one of the few independent egg producer processors left, according to Fink.

"There's only about 1,000 of us left in the United States," he said. "At one time, there was probably that many in Lancaster."

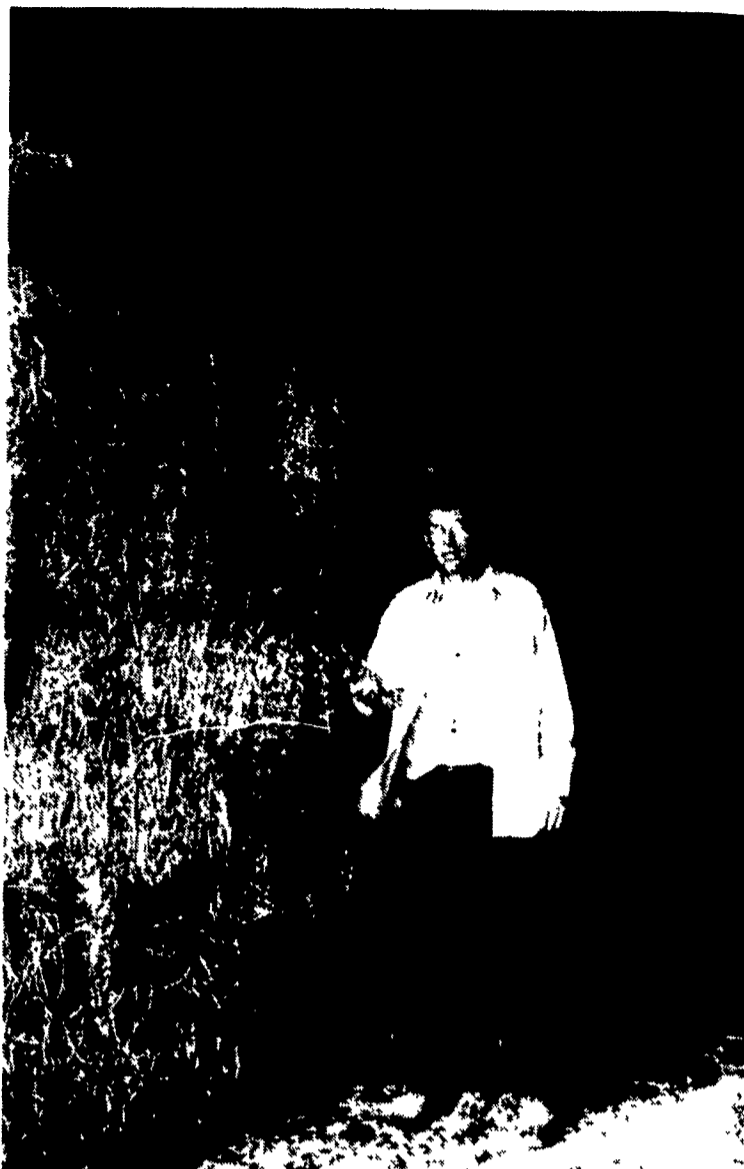
The egg operation ships more than 600 cases or about 2,000 dozen eggs per week. They service all types of accounts, said Fink, including restaurants, hotels, hospitals, grocery stores, and others. Quality and service are the keys to the success of the business, according to Fink.

Compresses alfalfa

But it was a while ago when Fink realized the potential of selling hay not only domestically, but internationally. About 50 percent of his business bales and compresses fresh quality alfalfa (much of it tested regularly, at 20-30 tests per year) overseas, especially to horse farms in the Caribbean and in Europe (about 55 percent of the total shipped). The other 45 percent is comprised of dairy and other livestock farms overseas.

Also, some of the hay is used to make mulch, said Fink.

Sales are helped along by some



According to the Certified Alfalfa Council, David Fink's alfalfa production has averaged more than four tons per acres for several years. The bales are dried using heated, forced air (about 100 tons per week at the peak of the season in September) and stacked on pallets in the warehouse until shipped.



For his farm's efforts in producing and promoting the "queen of forages," and for serving the industry, David Fink was recently honored with the Producer Award for the Northeast region from the Certified Alfalfa Seed Council at this year's alfalfa awards program in Appleton, Wis.

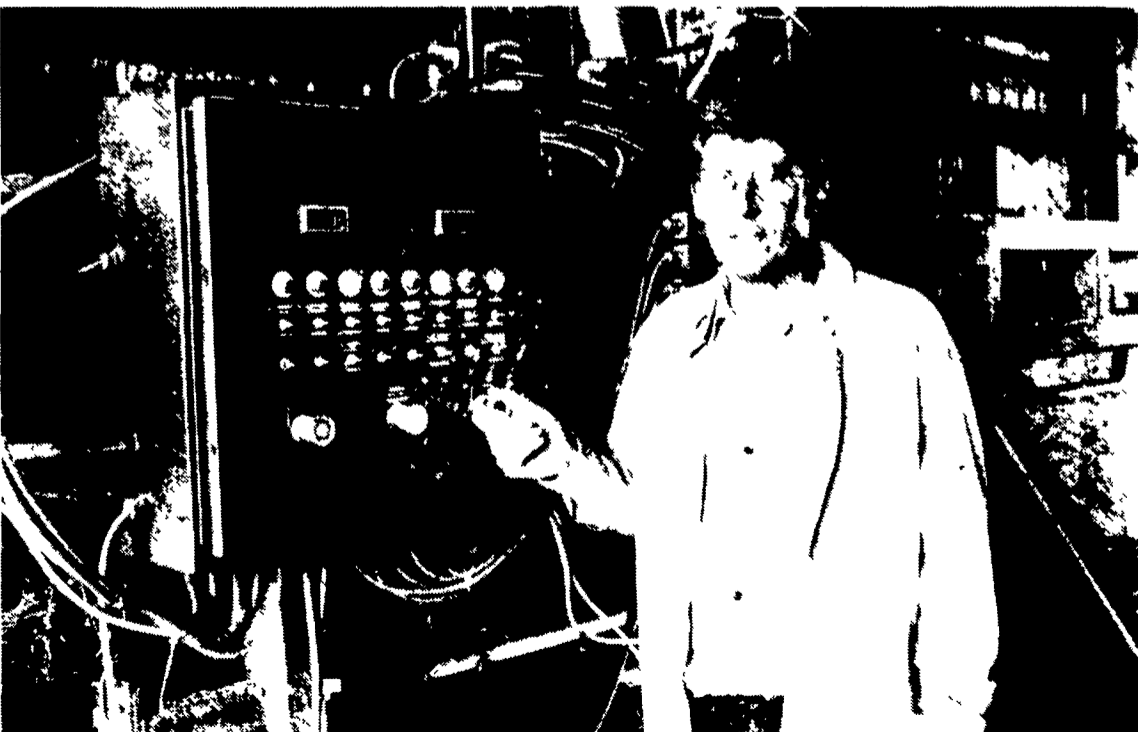
of the work he does as eastern chairman of the Market Development Committee, a part of the National Hay Association.

The Association has about 600 members nationwide. As chair of the market committee, Fink helps producers find buyers for their product in this region. He acts as a sort of broker for producers and a liai-

son for those who sell hay retail.

The Association is made up primarily of producers, according to Fink. "But there's room for more," he said. "There should be a lot more."

Fink said the recognition is "quite an achievement" and will help in marketing his hay.



Some bales, which measure 14 inches by 18 inches by 22 inches, are "compressed" to twice their density using this hay compressor machine and warehoused. About 620 bales (approximately 24 tons) are made to store in a 40-foot ocean container.



The hay is square-baled and accumulated in piles in a field. This hay rack is used to arrange and stack 10 bales per row, seven rows high, on six-foot by eight-foot pallets.