

Take Stock Of Alfalfa And Buy

MONTROSE (Susquehanna Co.) — Supplies of premium-quality alfalfa are tight everywhere, but not near as sparse as they are in the East.

Compared with last year, alfalfa production is down 15 percent in New York, 19 percent in Pennsylvania, 16 percent in Michigan, and 20 percent in Kentucky.

Several nearby states increased alfalfa production this year, but not enough to stem the drain from large eastern dairy states, said agronomist Dave Petritz, Purdue University. "It's not a good time to be out there with a bunch of hungry cows facing you," he said.

Demand for hay will be aggressive this winter, as eastern buyers seek to offset reduced production with hay from Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and other Midwest states. USDA estimates show alfalfa production as of Oct. 1 up 19 percent in Indiana, up 3 percent in Ohio, and flat in Illinois, but damage to the Upper Midwest's third cutting has cut deeply into supplies of premium quality hay there.

USDA's latest production report shows Wisconsin production down 1 percent, a 4 percent decline from August's estimate. "But the big hit was in Minnesota," Petritz noted.

Estimates now show Minnesota's production down 8 percent compared with last year, a 16 percent decline from August's estimate that showed production 8 percent higher than a year ago.

If the East Coast drains the

Midwest, Midwest buyers may think they can just go to the Great Plains for supply. But guess what? The Great Plains are short," Petritz said. "Buyers will have to look to the southern plains or mountain states for alfalfa, and they'll have to pay more to ship it in."

Petritz predicts that prices could reach \$300 per ton again in the Midwest. Prices all summer have remained near the typical winter price levels of \$125-150 per ton, with some loads reaching \$200 per ton.

How high prices actually soar will depend on several factors. A large silage harvest, mild winter, and the willingness of producers to adjust rations could all curtail demand.

Petritz recommends that dairy producers who have not yet purchased supplemental alfalfa assess their needs, evaluate changing their rations, consider culling their herds, and arrange for financing before the heavy winter demand period.

"It's been one disaster after another in the East," Petritz said. Not one cutting came by unscathed. The region was first hit with high humidity and frequent rains, which cut into first cutting quality. Dry weather in June and July sharply reduced second-cutting yields. Then an unseasonably cool August slowed regrowth, while insect damage chewed deeper into quality.

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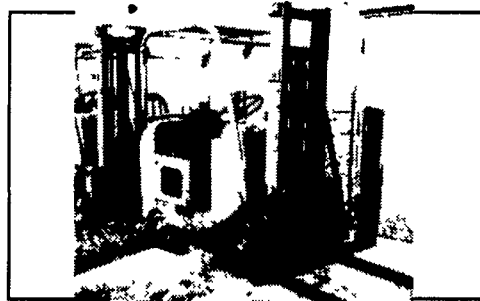


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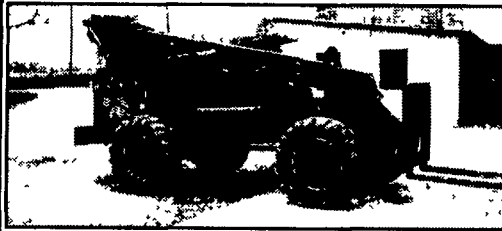
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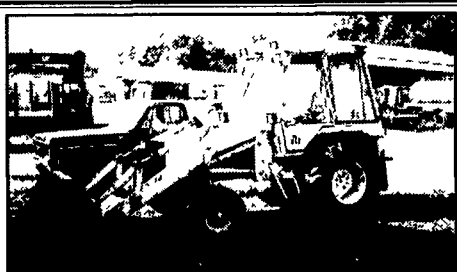
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