Nazareth Farmer Learns That Drying Can Lead To Some Really Great Bales Of Hay

(Continued from Page 4)

although Bieber is using plastic twine to see how it works.

"In two days I can make hay, bale it, and dry it," said Bieber. "I've already baled hay at 8 in the morning when it was cloudy and wet." Bales as high as 40 percent moisture have been dried.

"But we got the hay and the hay was beautiful," he said.

The important factor, noted Bieber, is to ensure the hay is baled with the leaves on it. The nutrients in the leaves are essential for livestock — the protein content is improved.

Bieber said he got the ideas off "other fellows with driers," he said. "I combined these ideas in one design. But mine is more efficient than the others."

Other driers use about six gallons of oil per hour, but Bieber improved the drier's efficiency. Now he can dry hay at a cost of 32-40 cents per bale.

Bieber has about 12-15 customers for hay, including horse and goat farmers. He has clients from as far away as Philadelphia and in New Jersey. One client lives about 15-20 minutes away from New York City.

Bieber delivers about 10,000 bales of hay per year. The bigger customers purchase about 800 bales at any one time. "I have another who wants 1,500 bales," said Bieber.

Bieber has a machine shop at the farm and has custom-built hay wagons measuring 8 by 14, with a false backing to allow the handling of pallets. The wagon's sides are made of 1-inch black iron pipe and are removable.

Bieber farms with Dennis Newhard, and Dennis's son, Douglas. Bieber hopes that Dennis would take over the farm someday.

For information about the care of the hay acres, Bieber relies on the Lehigh Valley Crop Management Association to take soil samples and scout the fields for insect, weed, and disease pressures. Bieber attributed a lot of good information he picked up from the association and from Penn State to ensure the success of his hay drying operation.

Bieber's management of the crops is just as efficient.

Bieber delivers about 10,000 bales of hay per year. The bigger customers purchase about 800 bales at any one time. "I have another who wants 1,500 bales," said Bieber.

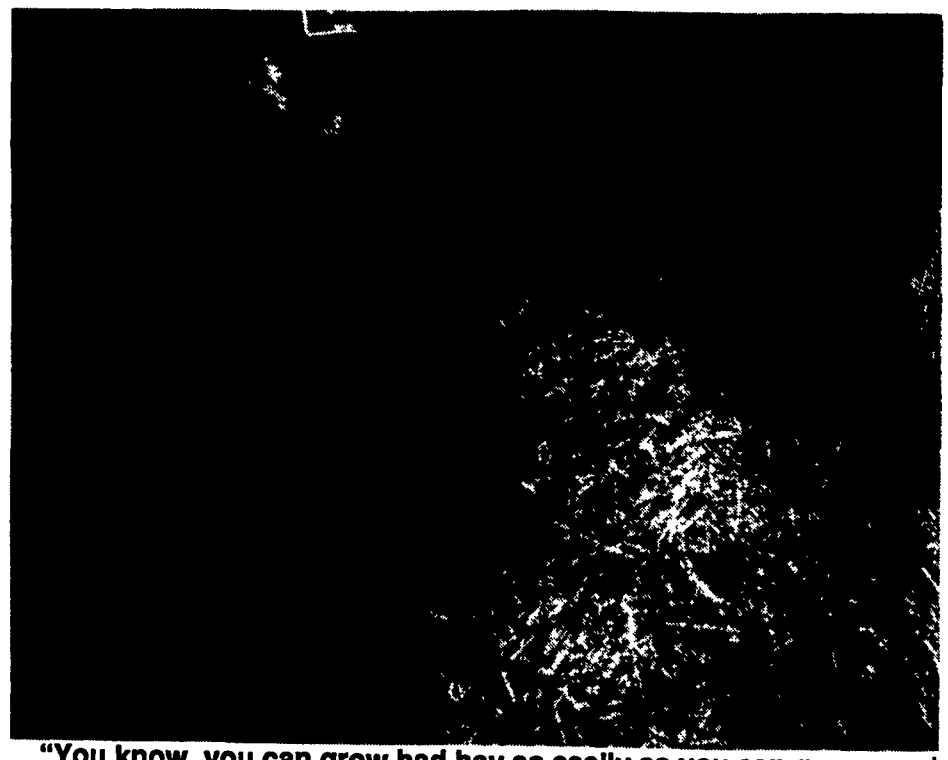
Bieber applies a dry fertilizer, 6-32-22, in early spring. The soil tests low for phosphorous and potash. After the first cutting, the fields are sprayed with a 10-20-10 fertilizer if they need it, about three gallons per acre and then the same amount after every cutting.

For weed control, Bieber relies on Velspar for broadleaf and grass control. They "try to get out in the early spring," said Bieber, but unsettled and almost constantly wet conditions kept them out of the fields for some time in the spring. The material had to be applied with a 35-foot boom sprayer late in the spring.

Insects — particularly alfalfa leafhopper and alfalfa weevil — are monitored through the association. They spray when insect challenges dictate.

First cutting occurred May 10 and continued through into June. The farm makes hay until late October and the beginning of November.

The problems faced this year, with a wet, cool spring, included stunting. The hay "went down from all the moisture," Bieber said, and browned out. Bieber said some of the evidence of the browning out from lack of sunlight showed up in some alfalfa bales.



"You know, you can grow bad hay as easily as you can grow good hay," says Bieber as he lifts a bale of alfalfa-orchardgrass back onto a pallet. But the Nazareth-area crops farmer points out that how hay is baled and dried down can alter the product's price substantially.

However, the orchardgrass "looked perfect this year," he said.

Bieber hopes to acquire additional leased acres — about another 30-40 — to add to his haymaking operation. He would continue with a 50-50 balance of pure alfalfa and the orchardgrass-alfalfa combinations.

For the alfalfa, Bieber used different varieties, including Doeblers, Beech Hardy, and AgriPro. For the first time, he used a special leafhopper-resistant variety from AgriPro and an orchardgrass-alfalfa mix from P.L. Rohrer. He's also using a Tekapo orchardgrass this year on one field.

Each year Bieber brings samples of his work to the Ag Progress Hay Show during Ag Progress Days in Rockspring, scheduled Aug. 18-20 this year. This is the seventh year he has entered the contest.

Bieber farms with his wife, Velma. He has been a member of the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council for about seven years.

The hot air furnace takes in hot air from a connected structure and is taken through a "trench" underneath an 8-foot by 8-foot by 38-foot precast concrete-walled structure with an open roof. Here, Bieber inspects the trench with his dog, Mitze.