



FORAGING AROUND

'Industry, Farmer, Scientist — Working Together Toward A Sounder Grassland Program'



Virginia Grazer Sold On Bermuda Grass

GAY BROWNLEE
Virginia Correspondent
HARRISONBURG, Va.— Michael Phillips has something to prove. On July 27 during the Second World Feeder Bermuda Grass Field Day, some 145 persons learned what it is.

"My goal in an average year is to graze year around and not make hay," Phillips said. "I'm gonna do it."

The progressive grazer didn't predict when this would happen, although he warned he's been known to "talk the ears off a stalk of corn."

Phillips invited field day participants to walk through the tender Bermuda grass without their socks and shoes. He spoke about the benefits of this versatile grass on which

he grazes a variety of livestock, including beef cows.

"The cheapest machine you can run has four legs and a fly swatter," he said.

For every person who is willing to listen and bold enough to try something new, there are scores of non-believers when it comes to Bermuda grass moving north from the deep south where it is generally grown.

"Some say it's too cold here for Bermuda," Phillips said.

He reported being laughed at so much that he tries to plant where the neighbors can't see.

Phillips and his wife Susan operate a rotational grazing system diversified with 80 brood cows, 40 ewes and two

poultry houses that, so far, have survived unscathed in the 2002 avian influenza outbreak.

Bit by bit, Phillips continues to kill off the fescue on his farm in order to plant more Bermuda grass. The preferred time for this is in the fall, just before the first bitter frost hits, he said. He then seeds winter rye — rather than ryegrass — prior to planting Bermuda grass "sprigs" the following year.

"I will not use ryegrass," he said. "It continually wants to come back."

The Bermuda sprigs can be planted by hand or by machine for larger areas. Phillips uses a machine converted

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Aged and new Bermuda grass is pictured at the World Feeder Bermuda Grass Field Day, conducted at the farm of Michael and Susan Phillips, Harrisonburg, Va.. The roots of Bermuda grass go deep into the earth to pull up moisture. Experienced growers of Bermuda can't say enough about its potential to make money for the farmer. The versatile grass is high in digestibility, protein, and tonnage; starts earlier, grows longer, and stays tender the whole year, they claim. According to growers, all breeds of livestock love it, but especially horses.

Lehigh Hay Exporter Keeps Delivering In Drought Year *From Field To Ship, The Finks Maximize Hay-Handling Efficiency*

DAVE LEFEVER
Lancaster Farming Staff
GERMANSVILLE (Lehigh Co.) — For three decades, David Fink has been a leader in innovative hay marketing.

Even through drought years like this one, the nature of his business allows him to keep ship-

ping large volumes of high quality hay to horse and dairy farms as far away as the Carribean Islands and Europe. Dry weather has also increased demand for hay on the East Coast.

Fink first began compressing hay on Heidel Hollow Farm here in the mid-1970s. Even today,

this enterprise is still relatively rare in our region, though more common in the northwest part of the country.

Much of the manual labor in Fink's operation has been eliminated over the years, but the principle remains the same: cured hay is compressed into super-dense packages that can be shipped as efficiently as possible.

With the help of wife Sonia, sons Travis and Mike, and a staff that includes about 18 workers during harvesting season, Fink markets 5,000 tons of hay per year. About 75 percent of that is harvested from 900 acres of timothy, alfalfa, orchardgrass and mixed hay stands on the home farm and nearby rented land.

Beside minimizing freight costs, the Finks also strive to deliver a top-quality product. Heidel Hollow Farm hay, in fact, posted three first-place winners in this year's Hay Show at Ag Progress Days.

"The key to marketing hay is getting the right product to the consumer at an affordable price," Fink said. And the cost of transport can "make or break the ability to get into the market," he pointed out.

The hay processing operation on Fink's farm converts 800-pound square bales (3 X 3 X 8 feet) into compact square bales, 22 inches long. Don't expect to grab one of these little bales, however, and toss it into the hay rack with the ease you would a regular small bale. These bales have been packed together with about a million pounds of hydraulic pressure in a compressing

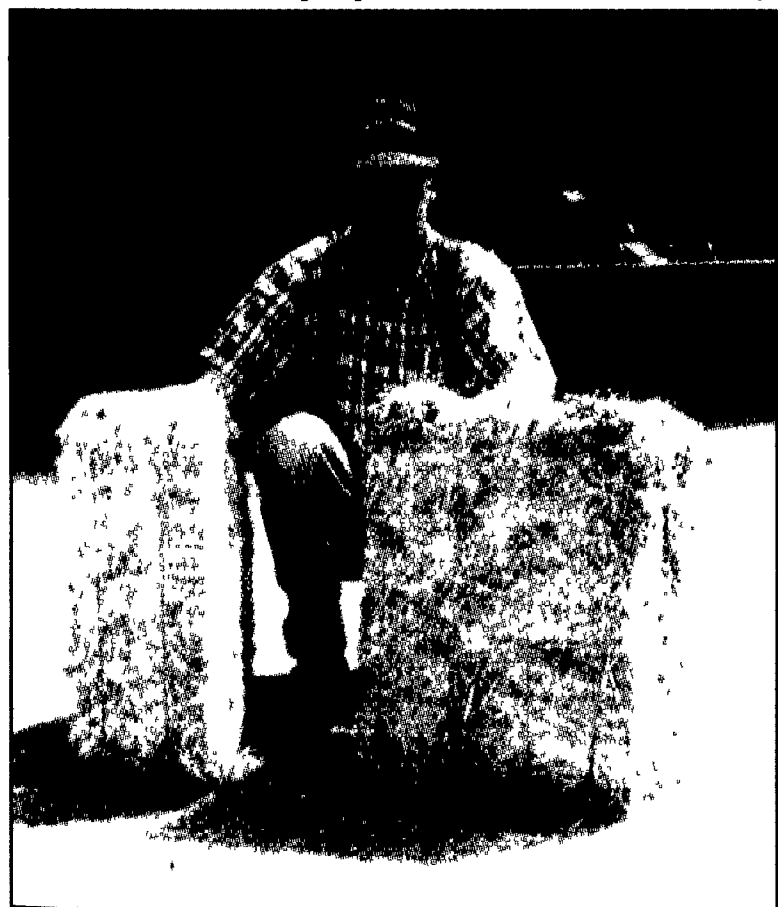
machine. The result is a bale weighing 70-90 pounds, depending on the type of hay.

The Finks harvest large quantities in a short period of time, as close to the peak of production as possible. For timothy, that generally means the pre- to early flow-

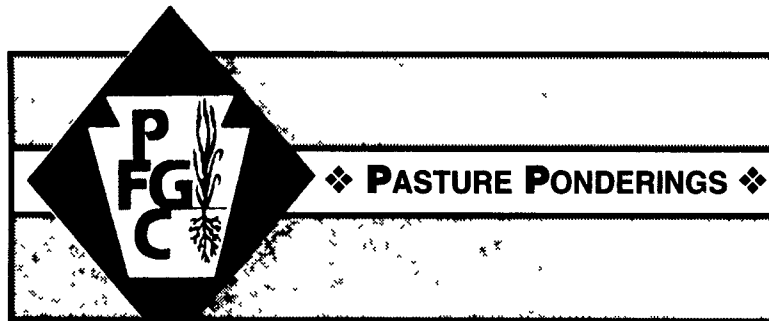
er stage, between June 10 and 20. Alfalfa harvest begins in the third week of May.

Once the season begins, "we just go," Fink said. Harvest is continuous through the summer

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David Fink shows off the final product of his hay processing operation. These compressed bales weigh about 35 and 80 pounds, respectively. While later alfalfa and grass cuttings have suffered from drought, the Finks have harvested more than 3,000 tons so far this year, including an excellent crop of timothy in June.



Duane E. Pysher
NRCS Grassland
Management Specialist

I find it hard to believe that my grandchildren have gone back to school and summer is drawing to a close. My oldest grandson is playing football this year, so that makes him part of the team. Well, just like my grandson, I too have become part of a team. Webster defines a team as a group of people working together in a coordinated effort.

By now, you may be wondering what team I am part of.

Well, I am pleased to say I am part of the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) grazing team.

What could a grazing team do? Is it a group that is grazing as a team? The grazing team that has been put together by Robin Heard, Pennsylvania's State Conservationist, has been charged with the job of providing technical assistance to the people of Pennsylvania to plan and install grazing systems. This team is made of up six

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