

alfalfa seed  
sample costs  
and  
production



Agricultural Extension Service  
University of California,  
Imperial County  
Court House, El Centro

Cost Data Sheet No. 8

## ALFALFA SEED--SAMPLE PRODUCTION COSTS

(Based on custom rates and yield of 300 lbs. of clean seed  
in 90 days on an established alfalfa stand) 1/

ITEMS	<u>SAMPLE COSTS</u>	
	Per Acre	Per Pound
<b>LABOR AND MATERIALS</b>		
Irrigation Labor - 4x	\$ 4.00	
Water - 2 acre feet	4.00	
Insecticides - 5x	15.00	
Application costs - 5x	10.00	
Bees (3 colonies per acre)	12.00	
Defoliation	7.00	
Combining	8.00	
Hauling	.35	
Cleaning seed	3.50	
TOTAL LABOR AND MATERIALS	\$ 63.85	21.2 cents
<b>CASH OVERHEAD - 5% of</b>		
LABOR AND MATERIALS	3.19	
<b>LAND RENT</b>		
	25.00	
TOTAL ALL COSTS	92.04	30.7 cents

1/ Some straw is baled after combining, averaging 1 to 1½ tons/acre.  
Use only if insecticides registered for hay were used.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The costs included in this fact sheet are based mainly on contract prices and on an average of costs estimated by several alfalfa seed producers. Many producers use their own equipment and have lower costs.

### STARTING DATES

Best possibilities for a good seed crop occur when the ~~last~~ hay is cut between May 1 and May 15. By June 1 to 15 the field is in full bloom. Seed crops made at this time of the year avoid the Lygus, stink-bug and alfalfa seed chalcid infestations which build up from early spring till late fall when the weather breaks. Also late crops maturing in August and September are five times as likely to be damaged by rain.

Earlier seed crops may not bloom properly due to cold weather and seed "set" may be light or delayed.

### VARIETIES

Sonora, Moapa, African, and Common are usually grown in Imperial County. Moapa and Sonora are resistant but are not totally immune to the spotted alfalfa aphid and are the preferred varieties in this area.

## IRRIGATION

Allow the plants to become slightly stressed for water up until the bloom period to prevent rank growth after bloom begins; the plants should be irrigated no more frequently than necessary to prevent wilting and to help produce well filled seed pods. The flowers of a slightly stressed plant contain high concentrations of nectar and are more attractive to bees.

### POLLINATION

"Bees" are the only pollinators of any value on alfalfa. In Imperial County it is necessary to rely on honey bees because of a lack of sufficient solitary pollen collecting bees.

### PEST CONTROL

Early pest control for Lygus is necessary and much more important than later in the season.

Control for the alfalfa seed chalcid has not proven successful and none is recommended.

### HARVESTING

Most seed alfalfa is defoliated using a dinitro general spray applied by airplane at from 1 to 3 pints in 8 to 12 gallons of diesel oil per acre.

## YIELD

The county average is around 300 lbs. clean seed per acre. Some growers will produce 600-800 lbs. of clean seed. Usually, at least 3 colonies of bees per acre used in the higher yielding fields.

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