alfalfa harvesting sample costs and methods

BALE

GREEN CHOP

DEHYDRATE

PASTURE

DRY CHOP

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Cost Data Sheet No. 13

ALFALFA HARVESTING METHODS AND SAMPLE PRODUCTION COSTS

(Baling and green chop costs based on custom rates and 1.25 tons air-dry hay per cutting)

METHOD	ITEMS	SAMPLE COSTS Per Acre	Per Ton
BALE			
	Mow	$ 1.25	$ 1.00
	Condition (optional)	1.25	1.00
	Rake	1.25	1.00
	Bale	5.00	4.00
	Haul and stack	2.00	1.60
	TOTAL	$ 10.75	$ 8.60
GREEN CHOP	(Green ton basis)		
	Chop	5.00	1.00
	Haul and feed	6.25	1.25
	TOTAL	$ 11.25	$ 2.25
PASTURE	(4.8 tons total air-dry)		
	Fence and water	3.10	.65
	Labor and transport	6.20	1.30
	TOTAL	$ 9.30	$ 1.95
DEHYDRATE	Price to grower usually approximates local market value for baled hay at roadside less harvest costs.		

WHICH HARVEST METHOD?

As alfalfa reaches the stage for harvesting, a grower may ask himself...

Shall I put up hay as dry chop, loose, or bales?

What about a green chop operation?

Should I contact a local dehydrator mill?

Or should I make a deal with a livestockman for pasturing my alfalfa?

Which method to select depends largely on the farming operation and the market situation at the moment.

BALING HAY

For sale as a cash crop, baling is preferred. Wafering or pelleting are not as yet a major influence.

For use locally as feed, baled hay is best. Most feedmills are designed to grind bales, and dairymen generally feed alfalfa from the bale.

Bales are relatively simple to handle and store. New bale loaders made roadsiding a rapid operation.

DRY CHOP

This method is not used to any extent locally. Field chopping dry from the windrow can be utilized with small livestock operations when fed directly.

Large feedlots would have trouble moving dry chopped hay through a mill in a ration mix. Harvest costs should be somewhat less than baling.

The baler has essentially eliminated the loose stack as a local method for harvesting alfalfa on a commercial scale.

GREEN CHOP

Acreage involved and livestock available are very critical in green chopping. Careful consideration should be given to these points:

- ✓ Predetermine the number of livestock available and for what period of time.
- ✓ Calculate the number of acres needed to meet feed requirements.
- ✓ Be sure to integrate green chop cycle and irrigation schedule.

✓ Avoid long hauls. Green chopped alfalfa averages 80% moisture.

Although green chopped alfalfa is high in total nutrients, success in feeding depends on the proper balance of acres and animals.

DEHYDRATOR CONTRACT

Increasing acreage of alfalfa is being processed by dehydrators. Growers furnish irrigation and fertilizer. The dehydrator will harvest the standing crop.

Cash return to the grower is usually near local market price for baled hay less approximate baling costs. Pay weights are determined on a dry matter basis.

Usually seasonal, some operations are now contracted for a full year.

PASTURING

Costs and management practices can be quite variable depending on the contract, size of cattle, and amount of feed available.

Total yields from pasturing average 75% of conventional haying methods but at less cost per ton dry hay equivalent.

Proper stocking rates and grazing intervals are very important for minimum forage yield, minimum damage to the stand, and satisfactory livestock gains.

A guide to proper stocking rates may be expressed as length of grazing interval in days. Essentially the number of cattle grazed per acre should be sufficient to clean up the field in 7-10 days.

Pasture units for winter grazing of alfalfa should range from 40-60 acres and not exceed 80 acres as a top limit. Larger fields should be cross fenced into smaller units for maximum performance.

An example of recent pasture rent for cattle - 75 cents per hundredweight per month for lambs - three cents per head per day. Around 20-25% of this charge can be assigned to handling and fencing.

As with green chopping, any profit in pasturing depends largely on livestock management. Both grower and stockman should show concern. Overstocking and excessive grazing can damage the stand, delay regrowth, and depress daily gains.

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