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CEREAL HAY IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

by

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Oats have been raised for hay in the higher rainfall areas of San Luis Obispo County for many years. The acreage has been between 40,000 to 50,000 acres for the last 25 years. This hay is produced primarily for on-the farm use by livestock for late fall and early winter season when pasture is not available. Surplus above needs is sold to local users, such as horse owners, or shipped out of the county, primarily to the southern California horse market.

Many farmers seed some vetch with oats to improve the quality of hay produced. At the same time vetch adds some fertility to the soil not supplied by the oats.

The greater part of the acreage used for oat hay is rolling to hilly land along coastal areas of the county. Most of the rest of the oat hay is raised in the west Paso Robles-Templeton-Atascadero area.

Oats, among the cereals, requires somewhat higher rainfall than barley or wheat to produce an optimum crop. High fertility is desirable throughout the growing season and 15 inches of well distributed rainfall is generally considered a minimum. Vetch grows best with a long season and even higher rainfall than oats.

There is little doubt that this is one of the best uses that can be made of most of this land. These soils are usually good quality loam or clay loam soils and even if water were available the terrain would make irrigation expensive.

The most common farming practice where oat hay is raised is to rotate with sudan as a dryland summer pasture. Some farmers raise dryland beans where the terrain is fairly level as a rotation with oat hay. Fertilizing is becoming a common practice and yields and quality are going up. Three ton yields are not uncommon on good rainfall seasons on the better quality soils.

These farms are family operated in most cases. The hay operation is in conjunction with a beef cattle or dairy operation. Some farms will have some irrigated land on which forage crops are grown and a much larger acreage of dryland range rounds out the farm unit. Most of these farmers own a major part of the operation and many will rent additional acreage. The average acreage of the commercial farmer is about 150 acres seeded for hay purposes each year. Many of these same operators raise smaller acreages of oats or oats and vetch to harvest for seed purposes. Their own needs are kept out and the rest sold as a cash crop.

As contrasted with 30 to 40 years ago the labor requirements of hay farming have gone way down. Hay operations along with wheat and barley have become as nearly 100 per cent mechanized as any farming enterprises.

The calendar of operations is very similar to other cereals except a rotation crop such as beans or sudan is used on alternate years instead of fallowing the land.

Late November through January - Heavy disk or chisel, springtooth and seed following first good fall or early winter rain. Seeding and fertilizing are often done together. If fertilizer is not drilled with the seed it is broadcast just before seeding.

February through March - Spray for broadleafed weeds if vetch is not planted with the oats.

Late April to mid-June - Mow, rake and bale hay. These operations now are highly mechanized; only hand labor is in placing bales on trucks and in stacks or barns.

Late fall through early winter - Early heavy tillage operations in preparation for the next years sudan or bean crop.

At present time this looks like the best use for this land. There is usually some "waste" land adjacent to the land that is farmed to oat hay. Cattle are commonly used to pasture this land and are part of the farmer's normal operation. Hay stubble is pastured during the summer. If sudan is planted in the rotation it is usually pastured July through October.

Agricultural Extension Service, University of California

SAMPLE COSTS TO PRODUCE GRAIN HAY IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY - 1967

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Based on 300 acres in hay each year and a 2 ton yield

	Labor		Tractor Hours	Truck Hours	Cost per Acre	
	Hours	Cost			Sample	Yours
PRE-HARVEST CASH COSTS:						
Disk or chisel and harrow, 2 times	.50	.75	.50	.20	1.90	
Drill and fertilize .30	.30	.45	.30	.10	.95	
Seed: 80 to 100# per acre					6.00	
Fertilizer: 40# N or (N & P)					4.00	
Spray for weeds - contract					1.00	
Spray material					.75	
Misc. lost time - re-seed					.50	
County taxes					3.25	
General expense (office, car, etc)					1.60	
Repairs, except tractor & trucks					1.00	
Insurance					.50	
Total pre-harvest cash costs	.80	1.20	.80	.30	21.45	
HARVEST COSTS:						
Mowing	.30	.45	.30		.75	
Raking	.25	.38	.25		.63	
Baling (contract 3.25/ton)					6.50	
Haul and stack	1.40	2.10		.70	3.50	
Total harvest costs	1.95	2.93	.55	.70	11.38	
Total cash and labor costs	2.75	4.13	1.35	1.00	32.83	
Investment based on 300 acres in hay						
Average value is one-half original cost. (34% to hay enterprise)	Original Cost	Av Value	6% Int.	Depreciation	Dollars per Acre	
Shop and equipment shed (34%)	680	1.13	.07	.09		
Tractor, truck & pickup (34%)	7,667	12.78	.77	2.55		
Tillage & seeding equipment (1/2)	2,200	3.67	.22	.49		
Special hay equipment	5,700	9.50	.57	1.26		
Hay storage	2,000	3.34	.20	.22		
Land, \$200/acre	40,000	200.00	12.00			
Total investment	58,247	230.42				
Total depreciation				4.61	4.61	
Total cash & dep. costs					37.44	
Interest on investment			13.83		13.83	
TOTAL ALL COSTS, except value of operator's management					\$51.27	

Tractor and trucks are charged 34% to hay, balance on sudan pasture, barley and cattle operation. The same for shop and equipment shed. Tillage and seeding equipment is charged to farm land only. Special hay equipment and storage is charged 100% to hay.

Labor is charged at \$1.50 per hour; tractor \$1.70 per hour; truck and pickup \$2 an hour; wheel tractor, \$1 per hour. Building depreciated at 30 years; seeding and tillage equipment 15 years; tractors and trucks, 10 years.

*Cost figures for the various operations are relative to size of operation, terrain, assessed land value and tax rate. Figures shown are average. Few individual farms will hit these figures. Larger acreages and flat land areas will be less and smaller acreages higher. In some areas a \$6 tax rate is high, some is low. Important value of these cost sheets are items covered and cost column for individual farmers figures.