

FEEDLOT PERSPECTIVE REGARDING
ALFALFA HAY QUALITY

Interview with Mr. Rod Foster (Foster Feedyard in Brawley, CA)

Moderator

Would you describe your operation for us?

Foster

We have had a 25,000 head cattle fattening operation for 50 years.

Moderator

Where are your milling operation and feedlot located?

Foster

They are located together in Brawley

Moderator

What percentage of your ration is alfalfa hay? What causes that percentage to vary?

Foster

We have three feeding rations which each have different percentages of alfalfa:

(1) growing ration - animals are normally fed this ration during their first 15 to 90 days at the feed lot. The amount of time on this ration depends on incoming weight and condition. Typically, this ration is 65% alfalfa.

(2) intermediate ration - transition ration of 40% alfalfa.

(3) fattening ration - 18% alfalfa

Moderator

Do cattle prices and feedyard head counts largely account for variances in your hay inventory?

Foster

yes

Moderator

What time of year do you buy hay? When is this hay typically grown? Can you feed hay grown any time of year?

Foster

Normally, we buy hay between August and September. This hay is normally grown between June and September. If we're lucky, we can on occasion, find reasonable-priced May hay. We can feed hay that is grown any time of year. The only seasonal restriction to us is the price per ton.

Moderator

Is this hay stored, or purchased to move?

Foster

Storage...typically 75 days to one year before we retrieve it in to the mill.

Moderator

How many miles from the mill can you afford to retrieve hay?

Foster

Fifteen miles or less

Moderator

Do you ever make arrangements to buy hay further away?

Foster

on occasion

Moderator

What hay characteristics are the most important to you?

Foster

- (1) cleanliness - free of grass
- (2) leafiness - percentage of leaf verses stem
- (3) moisture - must be dry to grind in the mill
- (4) color - prefer high color to bleach

Moderator/Foster

Can you tolerate a certain amount of:
hay that has gone through a heavy sweat? - no problem
course texture? - no problem
leaf shatter? - no problem, we grind it anyway
white fly damage? - to a degree...no black hay...the residue
mold and honeydew is still an unknown to us
weeds... what percentage? - no grass(less than 15%)... it won't
grind, moderate amounts other weeds are tolerable (like malva)

Moderator

What moisture level can you tolerate?

Foster

We let the hay sit 75 days. That is sufficiently dry for us

Moderator

We want to help our growers produce more profitable and marketable hay. If you were growing hay for your mill how would you do it differently.

Foster

I would not put up double-wide hay stacks...the stacks that get rained on don't dry out in between, and they get mold damage from their lack of sunlight exposure. Sometimes we need to hire a squeeze to separate stacks for retrieving. We need at least 18" between stacks.

Moderator

Would it hurt to 3-water instead of only having two irrigations?

Foster

The stemminess and excessive bloom diminish the feed value. The lower stem loses its leaves. I question if the farmer would have an increase in annual tonnage anyway.

Moderator

If you had to choose between baling green to keep good color and leaf attachment, versus waiting a day longer for good texture, what direction would you lean?

Foster

Let it dry. Bleach is not that negative of a factor to me. High moisture hay does not stack well. It is difficult to retrieve a leaning stack.

retriever - 2-ton or mid size flat bed truck, with hydraulic clamps which pick up one dump (typically 74 bales) at a time.