

New Uses in Alfalfa

Mike Lauwers, Lauwers Alfalfa & Straw Farms - Capac, MI

Deborah Samac, USDA-ARS - St. Paul, MN

Dan Funke, Dan Funke Farms - Larchwood, IA

Steve Flack, Flack Farms - North Manchester, IN

From fish feed to compressed bales, there are many uses for alfalfa that are not well known. This session will feature four speakers who are engaged in new uses for alfalfa production.



Mike and his wife Stacey have been in the commercial hay and straw business for over 30 years on the family's fourth generation farm in Capac, Michigan. They farm 1,200 acres with 800 of those acres being alfalfa and alfalfa/grass mixtures. Most of the hay is baled in large squares as baleage with some baled dry as both large and small squares. They also bale at least 2,000 acres of wheat straw annually. The straw is then reprocessed through a machine made in the UK for animal bedding and feed. Their hay and straw products are sold primarily east of the Mississippi River.



Deborah Samac is a USDA-ARS Supervisory Research Geneticist and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Minnesota. Her work focuses on the pathogens causing disease in alfalfa and strategies to reduce damage from diseases. She is using molecular markers to map resistance genes and to accelerate developing resistant germplasm. She is also interested in diversity in pathogen populations, particularly in those genes involved in pathogenicity and triggering host resistance. Dr. Samac earned a Ph.D. in a Plant Pathology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a B.S. in Biology from Colorado College.



Dan Funke is a hay/forage producer and custom harvester whose operation is based near Larchwood in Northwest Iowa. This operation strives to provide premium quality alfalfa and grasses to a variety of mostly local dairy and horse customers. Other services offered include mowing, merging, baling and wrapping, and the sale and sowing of all types of forage and small grain seed. The farm has a small machine shop which builds loader attachments for handling wrapped bales, which became a sideline business that was born out of necessity. Satisfying the needs of dairy farms in the region is always a challenge, yet it is made possible with the help of several great employees and a supportive wife. Two college student daughters have also found a niche through helping operate equipment and provide meals for work crews during the busy summer season. Dan has been involved with MFA for over ten years, serving on the board of directors and traveling to Washington, DC, for the NAFA Fly-in. He has found fulfillment in advocating for producers and the forage industry.



Flack Farms is owned by Steve and Lisa Flack and has been producing, buying, and marketing hay and straw for almost 20 years, and operating a full-time hay production facility for the last 6 years. Steve attended Purdue University and worked in the crop protection industry for several years. In 2013, Steve purchased a Steffen Bale Conversion System that takes big square bales, compresses them, and cuts them down into different sizes and weights to fit customer specifications. Flack Farms now grows several hundred acres of alfalfa, alfalfa/orchardgrass, and timothy hay utilizing 2 big square balers. A small experiment of making hay to feed sheep 20 years ago evolved into a full time business involving the whole family, which was always Steve's dream.