

Hay is His Business

by Dwain Meyer, North Dakota State University

Greg Veen, unlike most producers in north central North Dakota who have several thousand acres of cash grains, relies on his hay business as his primary livelihood. Greg, as owner and operator of Veen's Hay Service located near Carrington, North Dakota, produces about 750 acres of alfalfa or alfalfa-orchardgrass mixture. In addition, he operates a custom harvesting service, harvesting 300-400 additional hay acres, 25 quarters of straw, 1,000 bales of corn stover, and some pea straw.

Greg initiates harvest at the early bud stage in the first harvest in order to get across more than 1,000 acres in as timely a manner as possible. The latter harvested hay is put up as 1,150-1,200 lb large round bales with a Vee-mer baler and is marketed locally to beef cow producers. Greg estimates that he puts up 5,000-6,000 small square bales, about 60-65 lbs each, of alfalfa-orchardgrass mixture with a large percentage of it sold in the horse market (five loads have gone to an elk producer also).

"My customers like the small square bales and the grass-alfalfa mixture better than straight alfalfa," says Greg. "Much of the horse hay is delivered directly out of the field so I have little need for storage for the small squares. I have had more trouble selling the high-quality hay than I have with some of the lower quality hay," says Greg. He is always looking for new markets for the high-quality hay so those interested should call 701-652-2042 or send an email to Veen995@daktell.com.

Greg establishes new alfalfa by clear seeding at 10 lbs/ac in the spring. He pre-plant incorporates 200 lbs/ac of 11-52-0 and figures he has adequate fertility for the establishment and two years of production. He has used Vernal in the past but has been very happy with the most recent Mycogen variety that he seeded. He had planned to try Roundup Ready alfalfa this year until the injunction occurred. He pre-plant incorporates Treflan to control primarily the grass weeds and uses Pursuit for wild mustard and other annual broadleaf weeds.

Attempting to lengthen the life of his stands, Greg seeds 3-4 lbs/ac of Lata-orchardgrass using a double-disc-opener drill with a grass seed attachment, usually in the 3rd to 4th year of alfalfa production. After a year, the orchardgrass develops adequately to establish the alfalfa-grass mixture for his horse market. Winter hardiness of the orchardgrass has not been a problem. In fact, the grass seems to dominate after 7-8 years, when he re-establishes alfalfa to start the cycle again.

A special thanks to Diane and Greg Veen for the photographs (from top to bottom): Greg Veen proudly displaying large round bales often sold from Veen's Hay Service, the Vee-mer baler in action, and round baling in process.

