

Horse Owners Should Prepare for Higher Hay Prices

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The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has released several crop reports that indicate the number of hay acres will be down (2%) in 2008. The USDA also reported that the existing hay supply is lower than previous years. This information combined with higher input costs (i.e., fuel, fertilizer, land rent) and higher grain (i.e., corn, soybean) demand and prices will likely lead to increased hay prices. Through the fall of 2007 to the spring of 2008, the Sauk Center Quality Tested Hay Auction recorded record hay prices. Average hay prices were \$100/ton higher in 2007-2008 than the previous 5 year average.

To prepare for higher prices, horse owners should:

- Remember that quality forage should be the backbone of the diet (forage should be a minimum of $\frac{2}{3}$ of nutritional needs).
- Have a good working relationship with a hay supplier to ensure a consistent and reliable source of hay.
- Consider adding hay storage space to reduce the effects of price and seasonal fluctuations, hay is sometimes more expensive in the winter vs. the summer.
- Buy hay early; do not wait until late summer or fall to buy hay.
- Plan in advance, budget for price increases and reevaluate the number of horses you can afford to own.
- Finally, try to keep hay type (i.e., grass or alfalfa) consistent. Constantly changing hay types can lead to horse health problems, specifically colic.

This year, the USDA released 24 million acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land. Producers could begin haying and grazing CRP land in early August. However, horse owners should be leery of purchasing CRP hay. Hay from CRP land, known for its minimal maintenance and naturalization over time, may be less expensive but can include weeds and small trees (some of which are poisons to horses), and most likely will be lower in quality. Horse owners should ask if the hay was harvested from CRP land. If purchasing hay from CRP land for horse use, inspect the bales carefully for poisonous plants, and have the hay tested for nutritional quality.

