

The Saskatchewan Hay Report

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Sask. Forage Council

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It's Dry in Saskatchewan This Year

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For the week ending June 2, many municipalities across the western, central and northern grain belt had still not received significant amounts of rainfall since the winter. Combined with below-normal spring runoff and cool temperatures, many forage and livestock producers are concerned about deteriorating water supplies, and poor hay and pasture conditions (rated as poor to fair in many areas). In southern and west central regions livestock continue to be fed because of poor spring pasture growth. In some instances cattle are being moved east for pasture, turned into hayfields or are being sold to reduce herd size. Central and northern areas face a similar situation. Hay and pasture topsoil moisture conditions continue to be rated as poor to fair. Cattle are being turned out to pasture to utilize available forage, and in many cases producers continue to haul feed to their livestock. Water supplies are a concern for many producers across the northern parkland areas as well as in western regions.

It is too early to panic. In many areas particularly across the northern grain-belt and eastern regions, there is sufficient carry-over of hay from previous years. In addition, some pastures have good carry-over of forage that can be stockpiled or managed to last throughout the grazing season. Annual forages are a viable option, and many varieties of forage oats, annual ryegrasses and other cereals are suitable for stockpiling for grazing or greenfeed. What is of more concern, however, is availability of water in

sloughs or dugouts. In many cases water supplies will not last through the season and water quality is deteriorating. Producers may be forced to haul water, move their livestock or liquidate their herd. Producers are encouraged to participate in several of the water development programs that are available through P.F.R.A. or Ducks Unlimited Canada.

SAF is encouraging those producers with available green feed, hay or pasture to list these on their "Forage and Feed" listing service, available on the SAF Internet site at:

www.agr.gov.sk.ca/feedforage/

Prairie Hay Cutting Survey

Philip Curry

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A survey on hay cutting dates and systems by region across the prairies was completed in March, 2001. The survey was sponsored by the SFC and Ducks Unlimited and gathered information on hay cutting dates, hay systems, species and agronomic practices currently used by producers. Geographic variation across the prairies was also determined. The survey was completed by Doug Fast and Associates, a professional survey firm from Saskatoon. There were a total of 1939 surveys completed across 3 regions in Manitoba, 9 regions in Sask. and 7 regions in Alberta and the B.C. Peace River region. The survey analyzed hay cut initiation and completion dates, hay cutting system (1 or 2-cut), forage species, forage management and markets. The survey also examined where producers were getting their forage information (i.e. personal

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experience, other farmers, extension specialists, seed dealers, researchers and publications).

In Saskatchewan, the survey revealed some surprising results. With the exception of northeastern Saskatchewan, most producers only cut their hay once through the growing season, including alfalfa. The numbers of producers who cut twice ranged from a low of 7.7%-32.3% in the Missouri Coteau and south-eastern regions, to 48.1%-64.0% in the Prince Albert and north-eastern regions. Only ¼ of the producers in other regions cut their hay twice.

Across the prairies, the most common hay crops grown are: alfalfa (95.1% of producers); smooth brome grass (60%); crested wheatgrass (38.7%); meadow brome grass (38.4%); timothy (37.4%); intermediate wheatgrass (15.2%); Russian wild ryegrass (14.4%); alтай wildryegrass (8.2%); sweet and red clover (6.1%); native grasses (4.0%); orchard grass (2.5%); quack grass (1.9%) and other wild grasses (7.9%).

In Saskatchewan, most producers begin their haying operations in the 1st week of July (southern and western areas). In the remaining regions, 1st cuts are spread out from July 1 to July 20, with the latest 1st cut haying operations occurring in north-central areas near Leask, Shell Lake and Spiritwood (July 21-25). The top two factors for starting to cut hay are forecast of dry weather and stage of alfalfa maturity.

A significant number of producers utilize their hay fields for fall grazing. This ranges from a low of 25% in northeastern Saskatchewan to over 64% in south-central Saskatchewan. The average across the province is 47.7%.

Finally the survey provided some interesting information on where producers receive their information on forage establishment, management and marketing. The results vary by province; in Saskatchewan, the majority of producers rely on personal experience or recommendations from other farmers to get their forage information. Other main sources of information come from forage literature, and recommendations from seed dealers and provincial agriculture extension personnel.

The survey results are summarized by region across the prairies and are available from the Saskatchewan Forage Council or Ducks Unlimited Canada.

Niche Markets in Square Bales?

*Chris Nykoluk, Range Management
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Niche markets exist when there is more demand in a small specific sector that is not being met by supply. I believe that this situation currently exists in areas close to Saskatoon and Regina in the horse hay market. We know that there is an acreage building boom going on around the cities of Saskatoon and Regina. Baby boomers are finally realizing their dream of living out in the country, and perhaps having a few horses around the place. The horse industry has gathered strength in the past few years, and perhaps it mirrors this concurrent trend in acreage development. The number of horse boarding facilities around each city has become numerous. Many new acreage owners and boarding facilities have neither the time, desire nor ability to make horse hay and this situation creates opportunities for those seeking a steady market for their hay products.

Conversations with those providing boarding services indicate that they have

two primary problems locating good horse hay:

-Few people seem to be able to produce the quality of hay that they are looking for (in both square bale and round bale hay)

- they can't buy enough of it (within a reasonable shipping distance) when they find that good quality square bale hay.

Why square bales?

Horse hay can either be in square or round bales, but horse hay markets will demand square bales for a long time to come. This is for four reasons.

1. Many of the people feeding just a few horses do not have adequate equipment to feed large round bales. Square bales are easier for people to feed, and especially women and youth.
2. It is easier to control a horse's intake with square bales than round - many horses will simply get too fat when they have all-day access to a round bale. Overweight causes health problems.
3. There is a smaller percentage of feeding loss with square bales than round.
4. Feeding round bales to horses can cause respiratory problems and once a horse develops respiratory problems, managing the health of the horse can become problematic. This is especially so over the long term and horses can live up to 30 years. Many round bales are dusty in the centre (especially the hard cored type) and if a horse parks itself on the round bale for a long period of time (ie being the greedy type!), they will inhale a lot of this dust and respiratory problems seem inevitable at some point.

What forage species of hay?

Many people feed alfalfa grass mix bales but some people are specific about wanting a good grass-only hay. There are two reasons for this. Feeding too much alfalfa can cause kidney problems in horses and secondly, there is less wastage in a grass bales (in square and especially round). There are also fewer problems with alfalfa mold. Feeding moldy hay to horses is a risk, and especially if the hay is fed by hired help who may not pay attention to detail that the horse facility owner would (ie. they need to check *each and every bale fed*). The facility owner reduces risk to valuable animals by buying grass hays for the hired help to feed. There appears to be a shortage of long stemmed grass hay species for feeding horses. Many observations indicate that horses do very well on crested wheatgrass hay and seem to find it more palatable than smooth brome. Smooth brome seems to develop more leaf diseases than crested wheatgrass. Smooth brome also seems to get dustier as the winter progresses for some reason. Nonetheless, one can indeed find good quality smooth brome bales in the market. Crested wheatgrass and smooth brome seem to be the only two grass hay options in the Regina market area - areas further north may also have access to good quality timothy grass hays. A feeding program that includes a good grass hay, a small amount of alfalfa pellets, oats (for working horses) and a supplement ensures that horses perform well through the winter.

What is the going rate?

Good quality square bale hays (grass, and some grass with a bit of alfalfa mix) was selling in the Regina market area in the range of \$80-100 tonne this fall (*if you could find the hay*). This equates to:

	\$80/tonne	\$100/tonne
50 lb bale	\$2.00/bale	\$2.50/bale
70 lb bale	\$2.80/bale	\$3.50/bale

How do I locate horse hay buyers?

Ideas include flyers in public areas of known horse communities (post offices, gas stations, horse feed and tack supply stores), horse show facilities (Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw and others), Saskatoon horse

New Forage Programs Available in Saskatchewan

Several new hay and pasture development programs are available to Saskatchewan producers this year. Sask. Ag. & Food's Saskatchewan Conservation Cover Program offers assistance for conversion of annual cropland to perennial forages. The four-year, \$26-million program offers a \$15/acre payment for establishing forages (maximum 50 acres; minimum 5 acres) and the producer must use a Canada No. 1 minimum quality seed. For the 2001 program year, \$5 million in funding is available. Producers must fill out an application form available at Rural Service Centres or through SAF's website at:

www.agr.gov.sk.ca/crops/forage/pasture

Uptake for the program is strong this year with over 4000 applications received to date. Interest in the program is picking up since

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boarding facility listings (one may be found in the Saskatchewan Horse Federation publication "Show Trail") and word of mouth. Word of mouth is likely the most important - if you are already selling good horse hay, ask your customers for referrals. Buyers will probably buy from your repeatedly if you can supply the type of product they are looking for. Boarding facilities that do not produce their own hay will be shopping for next year's hay just about the time you can get it baled.

spring seeding has been completed and moisture conditions have improved, particularly in western regions.

Ducks Unlimited Canada provides financial incentives to landowners to establish forage for hay or pasture on cultivated lands. Over 50,000 acres have been converted to hay and pasture in the last four years through DUC funding. Over 550 producers are enrolled in these programs. In 2001, DUC has allocated \$2.5 million for hay and pasture conversion programs in Saskatchewan. Over 390 producers have enrolled nearly 63,000 acres in the DUC programs this year. For more information on these hay and pasture programs contact the DUC office nearest to you. Offices are located in: Saskatoon, Regina, Yorkton, Wadena, Melfort, and North Battleford.

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