

Producing Dairy Quality Alfalfa Forage

The Situation

The dairy industry in Idaho has expanded from 171,000 cows in 1989 to 329,000 in 1999. This ranks Idaho 6th in the Nation in dairy production. Because of this increase, there has been a corresponding demand for high quality alfalfa hay.

Quality has a direct effect on milk production and consequently, the value and price of alfalfa hay. By feeding high quality alfalfa in the ration, dairy producers can decrease the amount of concentrates fed and increase utilization of the alfalfa.

Market newsletters and actual sales of alfalfa have shown a premium of \$20 to \$35 a ton for the prime quality alfalfa over feeder hay.

The Response

An extension advisory committee has identified improving the quality of alfalfa as a primary objective for the next five years.

Extension educators, representatives of the Idaho Hay Association, growers, and allied industry have collaborated to provide educational information to aid in the production of quality alfalfa.

Newsletters, schools, variety trials, alfalfa prediction sticks and hay contests have all been methods to educate growers about quality alfalfa.

Achievements

Each year more than 100 participants have attended an alfalfa school held in Rexburg where growers and students receive educational information and instruction on alfalfa quality.

A quality alfalfa contest has been held at the Eastern Idaho State Fair to educate growers and others about quality alfalfa forage. This annual event involves approximately 40 growers. Statistics from the contest have shown steady improvement in quality of second crop alfalfa over an 11-year period.

Variety trials in cooperation with seed companies are conducted in the Mud Lake area, the trials have included testing for quality to determine the most suitable varieties for producing high quality dairy alfalfa.

Information has been presented at alfalfa schools and workshops on testing, quality grades, weed control, fertilizer, and harvest management. Over 80 alfalfa quality prediction sticks were sold to growers as a harvest aid to produce quality alfalfa.

According to the Idaho Statistical Reporting Service the counties of Bonneville, Clark, Fremont, Jefferson, and Madison produced 674,000 tons of alfalfa in 1998.

The information and methods used by extension have resulted in at least a 5 percent increase in quality alfalfa produced.

A 5 percent improvement in quality and a modest \$20 increase in price per ton translate into \$67,440 of additional income to growers.

For More Information

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