



New Mexico State University

Extension Plant Sciences

Alfalfa Market News

New Mexico Hay Association, www.nmhay.com



New Mexico State University □ Cooperative Extension Service □ U.S. Department of Agriculture

Hay Prices for New Mexico and S. Colorado

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County	Contact	Premium Hay (\$/ton)	Top Quality Hay (\$/ton)	Other Hay (\$/ton)	Cut Complete	Market Activity
Bernalillo	Bob Pate, County Agent	\$230 large, \$7.00/bale; \$215 large in the field, \$6.50/bale	\$215 large, \$6.50/bale; \$198 large in the field, \$6.00/bale	\$149 large, \$4.50/bale; \$130 large in the field, \$4.00/bale	2 nd 50%, rain delays	Active; some damaged on the ground
Chaves	Sandra Barraza, County Agent	\$200-225 large; \$255 small or \$8.50 per bale	\$190-200 large	\$165-175 brown; \$180-190 oat hay	3 rd 50%, rain delays	Slowed some; mature and damaged hay
Dona Ana	Rafa Realivasquez, County Agent	\$185 large; \$7.00/bale small	\$165 large; \$5.50/bale small	\$145 large; \$4.50/bale small	3 rd 75%, rain delays	Good
Eddy	Woods Houghton, County Agent	\$180-190 dairy large; \$200-210 small	\$180-190 large; \$200-210 small	\$150-160 oats, dairy	3 rd 75%	Most growers contracted for year-all cuts
Lea	Wayne Cox, County Agent	\$205-225 large	\$190-205 large	\$150 and up	3 rd 75%	Active
Roosevelt	Patrick Kircher, County Agent	\$225 large	\$195-200 large	\$6.50-7.00 small squares	3 rd Started	Steady; Cool, rainy weather-fields in good condition
Torrance	Gene Winn, County Agent	\$180-200 FOB	\$160-180	\$160-180	2 nd 20%, rain delays	High, delays leading to low quality
SE & SW Colorado	USDA-CO	\$185-200 large, \$7.00/bale small	\$175-185 large	\$140 fair large; \$135 utility del	2 nd Started delayed	Active, Very Good Demand

Common Concerns in Alfalfa Establishment

Calvin Trostle, Extension Agronomist, Texas A&M-Lubbock

The distinct advantages of fall seeding alfalfa

I am often surprised at the number of producers in West Texas & New Mexico that attempt spring seeding. I didn't flat out say "No spring seeding," but I feel that way: I would estimate that 80% of my West Texas alfalfa growers who have seeded some alfalfa in the spring swear they would never do it again. Yes, a few growers have success with spring seedings, but they tend to be experienced growers. Insect pressure is minimal in the fall, weeds are on their way out and don't compete (this is good because your herbicide options are limited until 2 or 4 trifoliolate leaves are established in many cases), and you don't face near the threat of blowing sand wiping out seedling alfalfa even if you have seeded into oats as a cover crop. Furthermore, yields are often substantially less for a similar amount of irrigation water. Oklahoma research suggests that spring-seeded alfalfa there never quite catches up in yield to fall seeded stands, though that has not been evaluated in the High Plains.

We hope Roundup Ready alfalfas will be available again in Fall 2009. Use this tool to manage real needs—your weeds, not to do something you might otherwise avoid (spring seeding) even though the seed dealer might suggest you now don't have to worry about spring weeds. RR alfalfa will be very expensive, and you don't want to be risking additional establishment costs with early season insects or blowing out the stand.

Bottom line: Don't gamble your establishment costs in a spring alfalfa seeding, but **invest** them in a fall seeding.

Is cheap alfalfa seed ever a good deal?

First, let's separate the issue of cheap seed vs. poor seed quality. As Leonard Lauriault, NMSU-Tucumcari has noted, "You get what you pay for," and that is especially true with alfalfa.

If I have the opportunity to consider inexpensive seed, here are the questions I want to ask: How old is the seed? What variety is it? (If they don't know, why would you want it?) What is the germination? Does it have weed seed in it? Does it have *Rhizobium* inoculant on it so I am more likely to get nodulation and nitrogen fixation for my nitrogen hungry alfalfa? Has the seed been stored out of the heat? Is the seed a blend? Does this seed and the variety it represents have a broad cross section of insect and disease resistance, at least a high or 'R' rating to pests I anticipate in my production? Now those are good questions to ask—and answer—for any alfalfa. Keep in mind that a reputable seed company is looking out for you on this because it is in their best interest to have you as a satisfied customer. Yes, I have seen the occasional trial results that report that 'Texas Common' or 'New Mexico Common' yielded just as well as other varieties. But keep in mind that if you are pushing management on your crop, newer improved varieties are truly newer and improved and should have more potential. If you truly evaluate the cost of \$2/lb. alfalfa seed vs. say \$4/lb. seed, one does not have to produce but perhaps 100-200 lbs. more alfalfa per acre to make up for the difference over four years. And that higher-priced seed offers the assurance of seed quality, state department of agriculture testing, *Rhizobium* and fungicide treatment, and more.

Bottom line: Good quality seed of a reputable proven variety, even if pricey, manages (reduces) the risk you take as a producer. Hard as it is, I urge producers to set aside price initially, identify a few alfalfa varieties adapted to your area with a good package of insect and disease resistance, then introduce price as a consideration. Choose your variety, then vow to use your best management.

Seeding unnecessarily high rates (doesn't hurt, but then little benefit either)

If your stand establishment benefits from higher seeding rates (as a High Plains agronomist, in my case, say more than 15-20 lbs./A seed product north of Lubbock; more than 20-25 lbs./A seed product south of Lubbock), then you may not have adequate seedbed preparation. I assert that adequate seedbed preparation can readily save you 4-8 lbs. of seed per acre. Figure the dollars on that amount of seed savings! Alfalfa starts out thick in a good stand, but tends to thin down quickly to somewhat similar plant populations even if you used an extra high seeding rate. I will concede, however, that you may feel uncomfortable lowering seeding rates to 15 lbs. per acre (or even slightly less)—and the further south you are the more likely 30 lbs. or more is customary in your area. You are reasonably concerned that if for some reason the stand ends up thin, you could jeopardize your yield potential, and you know well that it is costly to have to reseed if the stand is not up to par. So, if it makes you feel better, bump that seeding rate back up 5 lbs./A. But ensure you have done what is needed to have a good seedbed and seed the alfalfa at least 6 weeks and preferably 8 weeks ahead of a killing frost so the crown is initiated. An adequate stand of alfalfa can still compete well against weeds. And if initial plants are fewer, then these plants have the opportunity to compensate to a point with larger crowns and more buds (hence stems) per crown. Texas AgriLife Extension Service targets about 20 plants per square foot after the first winter, and at least 8-10 plants per square foot after the second winter.

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