

'Quadruple King's Ransom' For Not-So-Great Hay

BENTONVILLE, ARK.

Arkansas hay producers are shipping as many bales as they can spare to drought-plagued livestock owners in Texas and Oklahoma.

Jamey Styles of Coal Hill is among the Arkansas producers shipping hay to out of state.

In June, he received a national award for having the highest quality Bermuda hay of the year from the American Forage and Grasslands Council. With 500 acres under irrigation, Styles has an advantage when more than 97 percent of Arkansas is classified as being under drought. He also has his own horses and cattle to feed.

"I get 25 phone calls a day out of Texas and Oklahoma," Styles said Thursday. "It's the worst I've seen."

Styles said he started picking up calls from Texas years ago during that state's last drought.

Those customers "have bought hay ever since."

"There's such a demand that people are getting \$65-\$70 for rolls of corn stubble," he said, adding he'd even heard about one person offering a Russellville hay grower \$100-a-hay bale on the spot.

The desperate need for hay has prompted some people to cut and bale fields untouched for years and the buyers are finding perhaps 25 percent of the bale useful, said Robert Seay, Benton County extension staff chairman for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

"There's some sorry stuff that's been baled and pawned off as hay," Seay said Wednesday. "During the economic boom, a lot of land was bought on speculation and has simply been sitting idle. Word of high hay prices prompted a

number of these fields to be baled and trucked out as hay."

Seay said he's heard from buyers in Texas that "bought the bales sight unseen and they were extremely disappointed and I couldn't blame them."

"When you look at a bale that may weigh 1,000 pounds and only find 250 pounds or less of usable forage," he said. "They paid a king's ransom only to discover they're really paying quadruple that for the usable amount of forage."

It's a black eye for an area that for more than a decade has been winning national awards for high quality hay.

However, because cattle and other ruminants require dry matter, or roughage, it's possible some of the lower-quality parts of the bale can be salvaged using a device called a "tub grinder."

"A tub grinder is sort of a kitchen blender of a scale that can handle 1,000 to 1,500 pounds," Seay said. "The junky hay can serve as a dry matter source."

Once the grinder shreds the less-than-perfect gleanings from the field, "you can blend in enough corn, soybean meal, or feed grain byproducts to meet protein and energy requirements."

Unfortunately, tub grinders are hard to come by, he said. "There's not one on every corner."

Lack of rain showed in the crop condition report for the week ending Sept. 9. Fifty-one percent of pasture and range was in fair condition, 36 percent was rated poor or very poor and 13 percent was good or excellent.

A directory of Arkansas hay producers can be found at: <http://hayproducers.uaex.edu/>. Δ



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