

CUTTING CROPS FOR HAY

By Brian Ashton and Fish Cordon, Rural Solutions SA

The dry spell and hot winds are putting great pressure on crops and pastures. In some areas of the State there is little or no paddock feed to carry livestock through to the next season. The Eastern States have a severe drought and WA is also affected.

Hay is in high demand already. Those farmers who have reasonable cereal crops may consider cutting hay as an option. In 1994 a number of farmers on Lower Eyre Peninsula cut crops with success. Frosted crops have been cut on many occasions.

The use of big square bales makes transport of hay more practical.

Ideally, a buyer should be lined up before cutting a crop for hay. This way a price can be negotiated and the baled hay can be transported directly to the buyer's property - avoiding double handling.

Particular weeds will be of concern to some buyers. Hay is not permitted to be moved between properties if it contains proclaimed weeds. Buyers need to be aware of the dangers of hay containing resistant ryegrass seed or ARG1 infected ryegrass. However, cutting a crop for hay can also be a way to control resistant ryegrass.

People buying the hay should feed it in a feedlot or a confined area, so that if problem weed are introduced they can be easily controlled.

Based on current harvest price estimates for feed barley, and using local contract cutting and baling costs, making and selling hay can return at least as much as harvesting and selling the grain. However, each situation will be different and people must use prices and costs relevant to their situation.

When calculating hay yield a guide is to double the expected grain yield. The ability of crops to fill out heads due to lack of moisture makes hay an attractive option. If the season does not improve, the hay yield could be three times the final grain yield.

To give yourself more confidence, cut a number of one metre rows from the crop. These can be dried and weighed to calculate the expected hay yield from the crop. Ring us for help with the calculations.

If crops are not cut for hay, farmers could still consider bailing the header rows for straw. To calculate the yield, multiply the grain yield by 0.35 - however this will vary depending on how low the crop is cut at harvest.

Rural Solutions SA consultants have a computer spread sheet that can help farmers work out the economics of hay vs grain. Farmers need to ring through their own costs and expected prices.

Fodder Registration

PIRSA and SAFF have set up a fodder register where those who need hay and those who have hay for sale can have their names and quantities of hay recorded. Ring 1800 999 209, or enter the PIRSA web site, to give your fodder details.

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14 October 2002