



Alfalfa is the 4th
most valuable field
crop in the US!

NAFA Priorities

Being recognized in policy and research funding decisions
is critical in keeping pace with other cropping choices.

NAFA requests agencies use sound science in policy development and adhere to established comment procedures.

• Sustainable Agriculture

- Alfalfa on the farm landscape provides many ecosystem services such as improving soil health and water quality, minimizing crop rotation N use, enhancing carbon sequestration, and increasing biodiversity. NRCS and other agencies should prioritize 'alfalfa-friendly' conservation and agricultural policies with the goal of increasing alfalfa acres 25% over the next 5 years.
- **Incentivize alfalfa production through conservation payments**, recognizing its environmental benefits.

• Alfalfa Safety Net

- **Title I Status.** We request the Agriculture Committee provide Title I status for alfalfa, enabling it to be on a level playing field with other major cropping choices.
- **Alfalfa Crop Insurance.** RMA should work with the alfalfa industry to develop a new revenue policy similar to those available for other major field crops.
- Include alfalfa in any national **ad hoc disaster or assistance programs** for agriculture on par with other row-crop payments.
- Since the Nation's 4th most valuable field crop does not receive program crop benefits, NAFA requests additional public investment in alfalfa research to help keep this sustainable crop competitive with other cropping choices.

• Public Research

ARS – Request **parity in research funding** with other major crops:

- Request an additional **\$15 million investment in ARS alfalfa research.**
- Request continued support for U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center.
- Request continued support for St. Paul ARS Forage Unit.
- Request continued support for Logan ARS Units; Bee Lab & Forage Unit.
- Request continued support for Parlier ARS Unit.
- Establish and enhance new use research at Peoria.
- Maintain support for Research Geneticist position.

– Continued **funding for Alfalfa Pollinator Research Initiative** (APRI) is essential.

NIFA – Request **\$5 million for Alfalfa Seed & Alfalfa Forage Systems** (ASAFS) research program.

- Work with NIFA on land grant commitment to forages (i.e., fill vacant land grant forage positions).
- Work with NIFA on other granting opportunities.

• NASS/AMS Data

- **Develop a reliable and accurate system for alfalfa price discovery.**
- Continue and enhance statistical reporting for alfalfa, including data collection in the Southeast.

• Maintain & Enhance Key Export Markets

- Work with agencies and other associations to establish LLP tolerances, synchronized registrations, etc.

• Crop Protection Tools

- Continue to work with EPA to support and maintain alfalfa seed crop protection tools (*maintain alfalfa seed industry's non-food use status*).
- Continue to work with EPA to support and maintain forage crop protection tools.

• Miscellaneous

- Monitor the Endangered Species Act (ESA).



National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance 2024 Priority Background

Alfalfa Safety Net – Crop Insurance & Title 1 Status

- The current Forage Production APH Program is severely inadequate, demonstrated by the fact that less than 10% of the acres are enrolled in the program (compared to corn, soybean, and wheat which are all >80% enrollment).
- The lack of additional insurance offerings such as revenue and/or quality protection (which other major crops have) is a major factor in competing with other cropping choices.
- Alfalfa is at a significant disadvantage to other major cropping choices since it is currently ineligible to receive program crop benefits through Title 1 status.
- **The decline in acres can be partially attributed to the lack of an adequate safety net.** Since alfalfa does not receive program crop benefits and the current crop insurance product is inadequate, there are reports that bankers are telling farmers coming in for operating loans to plant a different crop which offers them a better safety net.

Public Research

- USDA's research portfolio needs to be better balanced to provide needed research for the nation's 4th most valuable field crop. **The decline in acres can be partially attributed to the lack of public research.**
- Much public research funding is devoted to the "big 5" (wheat, cotton, corn, soybeans, and rice). The value of all hay in 2022 was \$23.8 billion; alfalfa alone was \$12.9 billion. This compares to wheat at \$14.5, cotton at \$6.4, and rice at \$3.1 (corn is \$91.7 and soybean is \$61.1).
- In its December 2012 report on Agricultural Preparedness and the Agriculture Research Enterprise, the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) noted:
 - *"The waning public investment in agricultural research in the United States contributes significantly to the risk of losing its international leadership in agriculture."*
 - *"The vast majority of agricultural research funding is now spent on a very small number of major or commodity crops, in particular corn and soybeans."*
 - *"Although the U.S. is the undisputed world leader in agricultural production today, continued innovation and investment are essential to maintaining a competitive advantage in the future."*
- 2023 ARS data indicate ARS allocated \$62.9 million (74 scientist years) to wheat, \$50.3 million (80 scientist years) to corn, \$38.5 million (64 scientist years) to soybean, \$49.7 million (78 scientist years) to cotton, compared to just \$12.4 million (18 scientist years) to alfalfa.
- NIFA's research commitment to alfalfa and forage crops is equally dismal. In fact, at many land grant universities throughout the nation the forage program has either been eliminated or rolled into cropping systems.

NASS Data

- The accuracy of alfalfa and forage acre, yield, and market price data must be improved:
 - in order for RMA to provide adequate coverage levels through its crop insurance policies (RMA relies on NASS estimates to administer programs providing U.S. farmers with a safety net against unpredictable growing conditions).
 - to provide greater confidence in an alfalfa farmer's ability to make well-informed marketing and production decisions.
 - to provide banks and other lending institutions the information they need to accurately project estimated yield and revenue likely to be realized by potential borrowers.
 - in order to accurately project coming trends, interpret their implications, and evaluate alternative courses of action.

Why Is This Important?

- Alfalfa is key to sustainable agricultural systems – its value for nitrogen fixation, soil conservation, crop rotation, and wildlife habitat is unsurpassed.
- It is the ultimate regenerative crop, increasing biodiversity, enriching soils, improving watersheds, and enhancing ecosystems.
- **If policy and research funding decisions are not balanced, we will continue to see this economically and environmentally friendly crop disappear from the agricultural landscape, leaving in its place more problematic issues (e.g., Gulf of Mexico dead zone).**

National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance
4630 Churchill St., #1, St. Paul, MN 55126
651.484.3888 • nafa@alfalfa.org