



National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ALFALFA REMAINS COUNTRY'S 3RD MOST VALUABLE FIELD CROP

St. Paul, MN - According to figures released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), alfalfa continues to be the third most valuable field crop produced in the U.S., valued at over \$9.9 billion. "Alfalfa represents incredible value to farmers both as a cash crop as well as a premium feed source," said Beth Nelson, President of the National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance (NAFA). "There is no other crop that produces more protein per acre than alfalfa."

While few fully appreciate alfalfa's many benefits such as protecting the soil, providing wildlife habitat, and fixing biological nitrogen so farmers require less fertilizer on subsequent crops, alfalfa is best known for its value and importance as a high-protein feed source in dairy and beef production systems. "Even though alfalfa continues to be the third most valuable field crop and has far more benefits than simply being a high-protein feed source, you wouldn't know it by the amount of attention and public research it receives compared to the 'Big 5,'" said Nelson, referring to corn, soybean, wheat, rice and cotton which garner the bulk of USDA research funding. "Research funding is critical in addressing industry needs and keeping pace with other cropping choices."

Alfalfa is key to sustainable agricultural systems and is an economic engine in rural communities – its value for soil conservation, nitrogen fixation, energy savings, crop rotation, and wildlife habitat is unsurpassed. However, alfalfa must offer a competitive value for farmers in order to provide these benefits and maintain or expand its acreage base. Being recognized in policy and public research funding decisions is critical in keeping pace with other cropping choices.

The risk management tools contained in the Farm Bill - Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage - do not apply to alfalfa since it is not classified as a program crop, often resulting in farmers shifting acres away from alfalfa into program crops. During its DC Fly-In earlier this year, NAFA representatives met with House and Senate Ag Committee staff to stress the need for risk management tools which provide an acceptable safety net for alfalfa farmers.

Alfalfa farmers in 42 states produced dry hay valued at \$8.4 billion in 2018. In 17 of those states, farmers also produced alfalfa haylage, valued at an additional \$1.5 billion, bringing total crop value to \$9.9 billion, according to NASS.