

Alfalfa in Europe

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The CIDE, Commission Intersyndicale des Déshydrateurs Européens (European Dehydrators' Working Group) was set up in the 1950s. Since then, it has also represented processors of sun-dried fodder. Dehydrated European Forages are characterized by high stability and very low humidity levels, which guarantee the health of the product and prevent the appearance of mycotoxins, molds, live insects, and any substance that can harm the animal welfare. The total production in Europe of dehydrated alfalfa is more than 3 million tons in addition to alfalfa are transformed into other types of forages in the approximate amount of half a million tons per year. Total of hectares destined to the production of dehydrated forages in Europe exceeds 250,000. Currently, the European sector of dehydrated fodder searches for 9,000 jobs in different countries.

Bulgaria: Growing of alfalfa in Bulgaria goes back more than 100 years. There are several local varieties. Alfalfa acreage in Bulgaria is about 100000 hectares, a third of what it was in the past, and of that about 30% is for seed production. The soil and climatic conditions of the country allow further expansion of these areas.

Denmark: In Denmark, traditional production stopped by end of 2021. Instead, a new production of Green Protein started. The production is based on raw material from 3.000 Ha of Alfalfa and clover grass. The capacity of the plant is 4.000 tons of Green protein with 50 % of protein. The product is used in compounds for egg layers and piglets. The fibers – 25.000 of fibers are used to produce biogas.

France: With 70,000 ha of alfalfa dedicated to dehydration, France is on the podium of European producers. Mainly concentrated in the Champagne-Ardenne region, these areas also extend to the west of the country, from Brittany to Périgord. Alfalfa is transformed into pellets, bales and protein concentrate on 24 production sites, at the rate of 3 to 4 cuts per year. Most of the production is destined for the French and European domestic market.

Germany: In Germany, there are 37 productions locations in the dehydrated fodder sector, that technically dry grass and alfalfa and press them into bales or cobs. The largest quantities are produced in southern Germany, which has a higher precipitation. Most drying plants are organized as cooperatives. Thus, around 17,000 farms (10% of all German farms) take advantage of the drying plants. In 2021, a total of 240,000 t of cobs were produced. Due to climate change and the resulting lower precipitation also in Germany, alfalfa with good drought resistance is becoming an increasingly important forage crop.

Italy: AIFE (Associazione Italiana Foraggi Essiccati -Italian Dried Fodder Association) is the Italian association representing the largest national producers of dried and dehydrated fodder. Every year, in the 30 processing plants associated with AIFE and located in 8 regions of the country, an average of 1 million tonnes of dried fodder is produced on a total area of around 90,000 hectares. Innovation and technological implementation of the plants allow AIFE to offer a top-quality product, the result of the work of a supply chain that places respect for the environment at the top of its priorities.

Netherlands: 8.000 ha. of alfalfa. We harvest ca. 12-14 Mt/ha.DM/year. There are 5 Dehy Plants. The fresh alfalfa is harvested, dehydrated and produced in 6mm pellets and 400 kg bales. Ca. 20% of our production is organic. The protein content is ca. 17%. Alfalfa is feed for ruminants, goats, horses and rabbits.

Romania: Romania's alfalfa area currently stands at roughly 410,000 hectares, the second highest in EU. However, yields remain among the lowest of the EU's largest alfalfa producers (often below 4 t/ha) and are largely weather dependent, but also affected by the prevalence of small and fragmented production structures and rudimentary drying and baling practices. Romanian exports of alfalfa pellets are small but increasing in tandem with alfalfa production and investments in pelleting technology, resulting in a positive trade balance in alfalfa pellets since 2017.

Spain: Due to its geographical conditions, it is the leading alfalfa producer in Europe, with an average annual area of some 260,000 hectares. Sixty percent of the crop is grown in irrigated areas, the main producing regions being Castilla y León, Aragón and Cataluña. Fifty percent of Spanish production is destined for the dehydration industry, some 130,000 ha per year. The rest of the production is ensiled, hayed or grazed directly. In irrigated lands, 5 or 6 cuts per year can be achieved, with exceptional yields of up to 15,000 kg/ha, which has made Spain the second largest alfalfa exporter in the world.

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