

# Producer & Consumer Survey: Increasing Alfalfa Hay Sales to Horse Owners

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Krista Lea is a native of West Texas, but has made a home in the Horse Capital of the World after a 6 month internship moved her to Lexington, KY. She earned a BS in Animal Sciences and MS in Plant and Soil Sciences at the University of Kentucky and has worked in Forage Extension for more than 10 years. In addition to running UK Horse Pasture Evaluation Program and chairing the National Forage Bowl Competition, she is also the workshop coordinator for the Alliance for Grassland Renewal, owns a horse boarding operation with her husband, Russell and their seven year old daughter.

Alfalfa is a high-quality forage for livestock, and the sale of alfalfa hay has significant economic impact on the agricultural community. However, horse owners are often reluctant to feed alfalfa or alfalfa mixed hay to their horses. This reluctance may be due to a misunderstanding of the nutritional benefits, or more logistical barriers, such as bale size. To address this, two surveys were developed to explore what prevents more horse owners from feeding alfalfa hay. The survey for horse owners included questions about the impact of nutritional value, package size, and preservatives in hay selection, while the survey for hay producers and brokers asked about their experiences selling to horse owners. Responses were received from across the US and totaled more than 1000 individuals over both surveyed groups (horse owners survey N=744; hay producers survey N=384). Notable results include the following: 1) Over 35% of hay producers sell more than 75% of their hay to horse owners; 2) Over 85% of horse owners purchase hay; 3) Horse owners identified the reputation of the hay grower as the most important factor when purchasing hay, above cost, bale size, delivery and hay quality; and 4) Nearly 30% of horse owners are not sure if they have ever fed hay treated with a preservative, yet 88% of hay producers report having sold preservative treated hay to horse owners. Full results and analysis of these surveys will be available in University of Kentucky Extension publications in early 2023, as well as hay purchasing guides for horse owners and hay marketing guides for hay producers.