



Producer and Consumer Survey: Increasing Alfalfa Hay Sales to Horse Owners

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RATIONALE

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-grass hays to their horses. This reluctance may be due to a misunderstanding of the nutritional benefits, or more logistical barriers, such as bale size.

STUDY DESCRIPTION

To address this, surveys have been 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. A separate survey asked hay producers and brokers were about their experiences selling to horse owners.

RESULTS

- Over 700 horse owners from 48 US states and Canadian provinces responded.
- Over 300 hay producers from 39 US states and Canadian provinces responded.
- Horse owners rely on hay producers and brokers for equine nutrition and hay feeding information more than most other sources including their veterinarian, feed store and magazines.
- Horse owners base their decision on what hay to buy by price and reputation of the hay producer more than quality, package size or delivery availability.
- More than 85% of horse owners purchase hay for their horse demonstrating there is a large market for horse hay.
- While nutrition is the reason most horse owners choose to feed alfalfa hay (**Figure 1**), excess nutrition is also why others choose not to feed alfalfa hay (**Figure 2**). This aligns with the idea that horses who need a higher plane of nutrition, such as growing horses and lactating mares can benefit from alfalfa or alfalfa mixed hay. Conversely,

idle or overweight horses are not good candidates to be fed alfalfa or alfalfa mixed hay.

- Hay producers still produce more small square bales (48%) than any other size, with roll bales (20%) and large square (13%) bales coming in a distant second and third.
- 60% of responding producers do not sell larger package bales to horse owners, with equipment limitations and personal preference as the leading reasons given.
- 88% of hay producers report that horse owners do purchase treated and preserved hay, while 60% of horse owners report they have never fed treated or preserved hay.



Alfalfa is an excellent forage for many classes of horses including this mare. *J Henning.*

Figure 1. Why do you feed alfalfa hay?

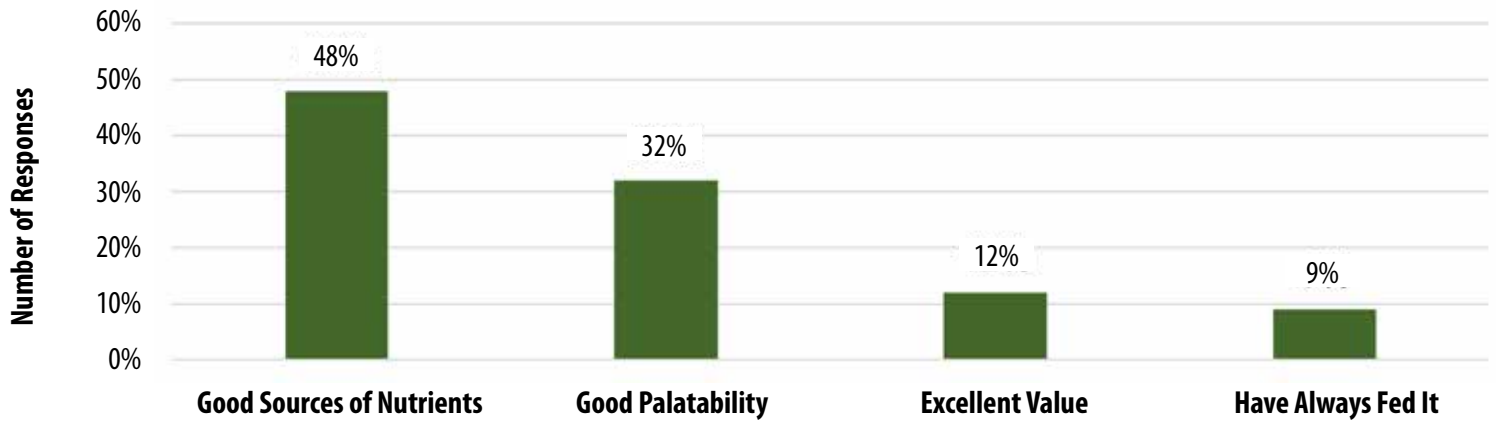
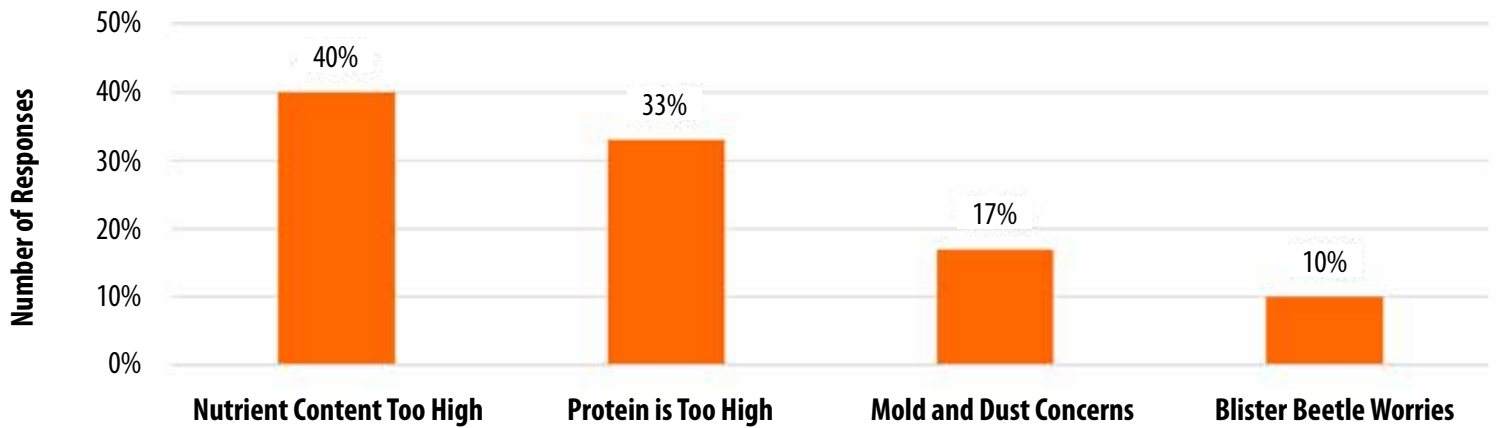


Figure 2. Why do you not feed alfalfa hay?



Thank you to our supporting organizations that sent out the surveys to their memberships:

American Forage and Grassland Council | Equine Science Review | Midwest Forage Association
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