

Big-time baler talks strategy for 2009

By HOLLY SPANGLER

TYLER Brown is gearing up for what could be a tougher year in the hay business. Brown, who raises 500 acres of hay near Gillespie and operates Brown's Custom Baling and Hay Sales with his dad, Randy, normally has as much as 20% of his crop booked by now.

"There's just not as much money floating around," Brown says.

Among those who typically book early are his dairy customers, but Brown knows they're in a bind, too. "We're hanging tight on pricing hay. I'm working with my normal dairy customers and trying to get them through the year so they can stay in business and I can still get them hay."

Brown's location puts him about 60 miles from the heart of good dairy country, though he also sells to the horse market in St. Louis and would like to expand toward Springfield.

Large scale

In an average year, Brown puts up 10,000 big bales, and between 10,000 and 15,000 small square bales.

"This year, we'll push the small squares harder," he says. "I'd like to get

Key Points

- Tyler Brown specializes in hay, growing 500 acres plus custom baling.
- Brown speculates hay prices may be off slightly for 2009.
- Use of preservative lets him bale longer and guarantee quality.

to 30,000 to 40,000 on small squares."

He is also looking to increase their sales in the Florida horse market. Brown says they already ship a lot of hay to Florida, but they are talking to two larger operations with the intent of expanding this part of their business.

Preservative has made it possible for Brown to bale in volume. His big-square baler is equipped with a moisture meter that automatically applies liquid propionic acid preservative when moisture reaches a certain level.

"In this area, I don't know how we ever baled without it," he says. "It gives me an extra three to four hours of baling a day. I can start when hay's pushing 25% in the morning, and I can go in the evening until it hits 30%. I used to start and quit at 18%. That means a lot when a rain's coming in."



NEW IDEA: Picking up an idea gleaned from the Cultivating Master Farmers program, Mark and Sherri Kannmacher added a hay business to their operation.

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WHEN Mark Kannmacher decided to expand his Martinsville farming operation a couple of years ago, hay seemed the obvious way to go. He and his dad couldn't expand their row-crop acres as easily, and they were willing to put in the labor hay requires. Plus, Kannmacher's day job as the local shop teacher puts him in touch with plenty of hard-working teenagers.

"The great thing is it brings money in every month of the year," Kannmacher says. "Summertime is a little more free, and we can use that to our advantage."

He started with 70 acres and expanded to 200 acres in 2008, mostly of grass hay. They sell locally, to either racehorse folks at the fairgrounds or to recreational horse owners. He's also listed his hay offerings on the Illinois Department of Agriculture's Web site.

In 2008, Kannmacher baled between 3,500 and 4,000 small square bales and about 600 round bales. He'd like to double that amount this year.

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