



Practice, weather and technology help make the perfect hay crop

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The first place alfalfa hay scored 26 per cent protein and 226 relative feed value. The second place grass hay registered 20 per cent protein and 160 relative feed value. Rowntree was pleased with the results, indicating some alfalfa farmers weren't able to get 20 per cent protein in their crops given last year's challenging conditions. He's says he was able to cut and process hay at the peak of its nutritional value, while the leaves are still plump, by using an inoculant product known as The Juice.

"The hay is treated," he explains, adding it's a relatively common practice. Today's balers have moisture sensors and computers which apply the inoculant based on the relative moisture in the hay as it feeds through the baler. "It allows for you to bale a little earlier, so it preserves more leaves."

Rowntree started looking at overall hay quality in the late-70s when he was involved in exporting frozen Holstein embryos.

"We were master breeders of Holsteins, and saw how important it was to have good hay for the cows for the embryo transfer."

He's added to that knowledge and fine-tuned the craft while taking advantage of scientific and technological innovations. However, he's still at the mercy of Mother Nature.

"We had a dry spell last year which affected the cut," he says. "The second crop was non-existent for a lot of farmers. The third crop was better."

Rowntree exports much of his forage; hay management is key to producing a quality product.

"I have 50/50 mix grasses, timothy and orchard with 50 per cent alfalfa," he describes. He deals with the horse market and Amish farmers who favour this mix. Rowntree boosts production by fertilizing in the spring with actual nitrogen to help the grasses. "We're not worried about re-plowing and seeding every three to four years, because we want the grasses."

Rowntree is a member of the Canadian Forage & Grassland Association and Ontario Hay and Forage Co-operative. The Milk Maker Forage Competition is open to dairy farmers across Canada. Keep up to date on the competition on the [Ontario Forage Council website](#).