

National Hay Association President's Perspective: What a Year to be President

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Over the years, I have had the opportunity to attend the Kentucky Alfalfa Conference in Cave City. Usually it was combined with a trip to deliver hay into Kentucky to either a dairy, beef, or horse customer. This is an excellent event.

The following is my “acceptance” speech given in September 2007 in Columbus, Ohio, when I was installed as President of the National Hay Association.

“In 2005 when the Convention was in Lexington, KY, I had a lot going on at home, and forgot to pack a tie. I figured this was no big deal, since I might not be able to stay for the Saturday night banquet. Graciously, you elected me as the incoming VP, so I didn’t dare leave. Had my wife been there, she probably would have just gone shopping and solved the problem. But, not being a shopper, I shared my dismay to the photographer who responded, “That’s ok! We’re just hay farmers!”

Yes, we are hay farmers! Whether it is making small bales for the horse and dairy markets in the northeast, making grass round bales for beef cattle in the southeast, making mid-size and large square bales of dairy hay from the heartland, or repackaging grass and alfalfa hays in the west for export markets across the pond. Yes, we are hay farmers! Combine the land uses of our hay crop with that of rangeland, pastureland, and meadows across this great country, and the acres covered with forages makes it the largest resource in the country, totaling nearly 55% of the land mass of the contiguous US, far exceeding the 22% that represents timber, our closest acre total. Add to this, the commerce that is accomplished when our hay products are sold and traded to support the livestock industry of horses, and cattle, and specialty markets, makes the cash hay crop #3, behind corn and soybeans.

On Thursday, NHA went provided a bus trip to the Farm Science Review. After getting off the bus, and looking at the show program, I saw the whole jest of the Farm Show. Across the front of the program, it said, “This is not your Daddy’s Farm Show!” Likewise, this is not Daddy’s National Hay Association! Wow! Isn’t that the truth?

I love this organization. We applaud our predecessors who established our charter 112 years ago. Our predecessors had great vision which was a response to the challenges of their day.

NHA has established its presence by doing things the right way: with honesty, integrity, and fair trade. I want to thank all of the previous Presidents of NHA for their insight and leadership.

We have new challenges today. Our Daddies did not have to deal with things like higher commodity prices for corn, soybeans, and wheat competing for hay acres; uses of hay for cellulosic ethanol; pharmaceutical uses; an Easter Freeze that eliminated a vast amount of hay acres from the High Plains across the Corn Belt; widespread drought in the southeast; competition from CRP acres released for haying and grazing; Roundup Ready Alfalfa; Carbon Credits for hay acres; pesticide residues on export products; and higher fuel prices affecting higher transportation costs worldwide. Just to name a few!

While these items may seem like obstacles in some circles, it really is just opening the doors to more opportunities to the hay industry, in general, and NHA in particular. With the many very talented people in NHA, NHA is able to maintain being the voice of the hay industry. But, because many of these same issues affect, or are affected by, other commodity or forage groups, it is my vision that NHA move to enhance those relationships. In these relationships, we need to understand that NHA and the other groups will not agree on all of the issues. But by airing our similarities, and finding common ground, we can synergize, and become mutually beneficial. I believe that if you are going to be a player, you have to be at the playground!!!!

This morning, I handed out the committee assignments to the NHA Board of Directors, and a few others. I let them know that we will be having bi-weekly conference calls for the Executive Committee. A few selected Committee Chairman will be invited to participate on these calls, and all of the Committee Chairs will be invited to call in on a monthly call basis. I feel that with increased communication, and participation, the BOD can be much more productive, and in turn provide a better value to the membership of NHA.

The Board is going to make it a priority to get timely committee reports posted on the website so that you can have the info quicker. Also, we are going to have a blog area where the Board or committee can ask the membership for its opinion, and the membership can respond. You will want to see this for yourself.

We are planning a Strategic Planning Session at the Winter Board Meeting in Louisville, in January. It was decided to get together and spend a day as a Board and brainstorm to get mission and vision statements. We also would discuss the values, goals, and objectives of NHA, hopefully giving NHA a plan (road map) for the future.

In an upcoming issue of Hay There, you will all receive a questionnaire as to the things that are important to you, as members of NHA. What things you feel we are doing well, and those, maybe not so well! Your input will be important to the discussions when we head Louisville.

For those of you who are here tonight, you are showing your deep passion and support of NHA. If I have overlooked you as a member of a committee, let your interest be known. Contact me or Don, and relay your interest in one of the many committees. If you have a special interest in a topic that we don't have a committee for, we may appoint an ad hoc committee. There is a place for the energy and the passion of each of you who would offer their volunteer services.

I want to especially thank E. J. Croll and Richard Larson for the past two years as members on the Executive Committee.

Are these ambitious goals for the coming year? Probably! Are they realistic? We are only limited by our own imagination! Can we get them accomplished? Come to Chicago next September and find out!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!”