



# the HAYMAKER

PROGRESS IN ALFALFA RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT

## HQ Alfalfa: The Answer to High Feed Costs in 2008

Many livestock producers have developed feeding programs that rely heavily on grain as a source of nutrients. With most grain prices now approaching record levels, such feeding strategies are becoming economically unfeasible. Currently, grain prices (corn, soybeans, and wheat) are very high, and could go even higher later this year, with tight world stocks and the recent downward revision in USDA corn production estimates for 2008. In addition, some forecasters now predict tough Spring planting conditions, which could also heat up the grain markets.



A number of ag economists predict that the costs of livestock production (particularly feed costs) will increase this year, with some of the greatest impacts felt by dairy producers. With milk prices flat to slowly decreasing, higher feed costs will place significant pressure on dairy profitability in 2008. Alfalfa hay prices in the U.S. vary widely by location and are quite strong in some regions. But in general, the price of alfalfa has risen at a relatively slower rate than grain prices—especially in the past 3 months.

How do dairy producers fight back against these increased feed costs in 2008? One strategy promoted by dairy specialists is to find a higher quality forage to feed, thus replacing some portion of the “expensive” concentrates (grain) in the diet. The WL HQ (high-quality selected) line of alfalfa varieties were developed specifically to address the nutritional needs of high-producing dairy and beef cattle. These improved alfalfas combine high digestibility and superior overall feed value with



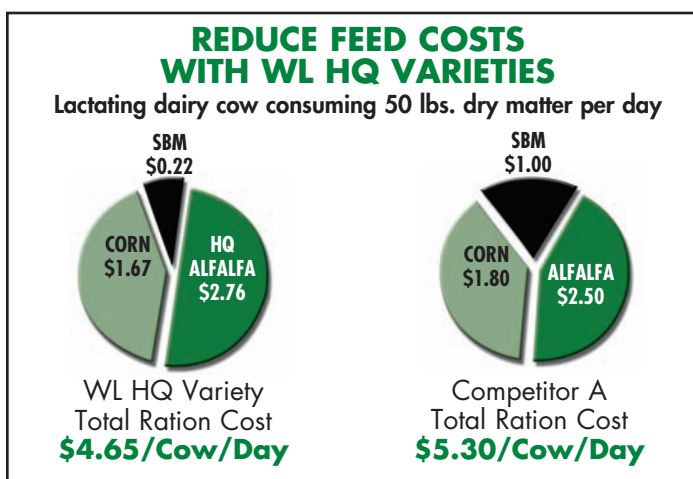
high yield potential, long stand life, and strong pest-resistant characteristics.

The HQ breeding program began in 1986, utilizing a first generation NIRS (Near Infrared Reflectance Spectroscopy) machine to scan alfalfa samples for protein and fiber characteristics. Since then, W-L has utilized more powerful machines and more accurate software to continue a steady rate of improvement in WL HQ alfalfas.

However, our most important quality selection breakthrough came in 1992, when we established an in-house, wet chemistry lab and began selection, using In Vitro True Digestibility (IVTD) techniques. Utilizing this new technology, we have significantly improved fiber digestibility and energy content in our latest HQ releases (e.g., WL 343HQ, WL 535HQ), taking profitability to a new level when HQ alfalfas are a key component of your dairy feeding program

In the chart, we see how including HQ alfalfa in rations of high-producing cows can lower daily feed costs by more than 10% when compared to non-HQ alfalfas. Since WL HQ alfalfas display significantly higher digestibility when compared to conventional alfalfa, HQ's can be fed as a higher percentage of the total ration dry matter. A smaller percentage of expensive concentrates (soybean meal, grain corn) are needed to maintain milk production, while overall ration costs are lowered by utilizing HQ alfalfa.

For dairy producers struggling to keep feed costs under control, feeding a higher quality alfalfa with improved digestibility characteristics and greater energy content (WL HQ) is one strategy that will clearly have a positive impact on dairy profitability in 2008. ■



# Roundup Ready® Alfalfa Update

On March 12, 2007, the U.S. Federal Court for the Northern District of California issued a preliminary injunction, placing restrictions on the sale and planting of Roundup Ready alfalfa (RRA) until the U.S. Department of Agriculture completes an Environmental Impact Statement. However, RRA that was planted by March 30, 2007, can still be grown, harvested, fed, and sold as forage. This injunction against buying and planting RRA seed was issued by the court, following a lawsuit brought by the Center for Food Safety, as well as others against the USDA as Geertson Seed Farms, Inc. et al v. Mike Johanns, et al.

Despite previous acceptance that RRA posed no harm to humans and livestock, the court upheld its decision that the USDA did not adequately follow procedural requirements as detailed by the National Environmental Policy Act before deregulating RRA. Under the Plant Protection Act, the court maintained that prior to the deregulation of RRA, the USDA would have to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in place of the environmental assessment that was completed in Fall 2005.

More than 4,000 producers in 48 states have planted at least 220,000 acres of Roundup Ready alfalfa since it was approved and brought to market in Fall 2005. What does this recent legal action mean to producers who have benefited from growing RRA, and where are we in the EIS preparation process?

- Roundup Ready alfalfa is safe and poses no harm to people or livestock; the injunction focuses on the deregulation of RRA by the USDA in 2005.
- Both the sale and planting of Roundup Ready alfalfa seed were stopped as of March 30, 2007, by court order.



Existing acres of Roundup Ready alfalfa planted since product introduction in Fall 2005 through March 30, 2007, are unaffected by this ruling; growers with these fields of RRA can harvest forage and utilize the benefits of Roundup Ready technology for the life of stand.

On December 21, 2007, USDA-APHIS issued a supplemental Administrative Order on RRA, changing the labeling requirement for RRA hay, enabling labeling by lot, rather than bale. This change removes a requirement (labeling individual bales) that was a burden for sellers of RRA hay.

On January 7, 2008, USDA-APHIS published a Notice of Intent to prepare the required Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), including the proposed scope of study for RRA. The notice identified potential issues and alternatives to be studied in the EIS, as well as a request for public comment. The agency will consider all public comments received before February 6, 2008; at last count, there were over 300 public comments on the RRA EIS posted to the USDA-APHIS web site. This period of feedback was a good opportunity for individual growers to discuss the value of RRA technology in their producing operations. To view all comments (pro and con) go to [www.roundupreadyalfalfa.com](http://www.roundupreadyalfalfa.com) and follow the link to the USDA EIS web site.

All of us at W-L Research wish to thank our grower-customers for their support during the rollout and introduction of RRA to the market. W-L Roundup Ready alfalfa was the most widely grown brand of RRA in the country, up to the stop-plant injunction. In the meantime, we have adequate seed supplies of all our elite, conventional WL products to meet your planting needs for Spring 2008. Whether conventional or Roundup Ready, W-L Research is the Leader in Alfalfa Technology! ■

## W-L Research: Celebrating Our Golden Anniversary!



In 1958, Ward Waterman and Harold Loomis took a risk. Envisioning an organization based on research, and dedicated exclusively to the development of high performance, high quality alfalfas, these two experienced California seedsmen pooled their

resources to form the Waterman-Loomis Seed Company (later renamed W-L Research).

What began as a West Coast venture eventually spread throughout the country (and the world), as W-L Research planted research plots and developed elite products for all major alfalfa producing regions in the U.S. Over the years, as the company's list of accomplishments and level of customer satisfaction grew, the initials W-L became synonymous with premium alfalfa varieties and superior service after the sale.

For 50 years, W-L Research has never compromised quality, and we will continue to provide the same high level of service and integrity on which the company was founded. We are proud of our past and even more confident in our future. New developments, such as the latest HQ alfalfas (WL 343HQ, WL 535HQ), 6th generation

potato leafhopper resistance, Roundup Ready® alfalfa, and "wet soil" tolerant types (WL 348AP) are clear examples of our commitment to improving the profitability of the American producer.

"Better Seed Through Research" is more than our slogan—it's what we've delivered to our customers for over 50 years. A sincere "thanks" to all of the employees, university supporters, and customers who have contributed to W-L's success since the first bag of W-L alfalfa seed was sold (and planted) in 1958. ■



Dr. Dave Beard, Founding Research Director for W-L, in the seed vault at Bakersfield, CA, circa 1961.