

of Forage



Bentley McIntyre (left) learns the ropes, while Ben, his dad; two uncles, Spencer and Brad; and granddad, Loren, get ready for another day on the farm.

with the crop now accounting for nearly 1,000 acres. While Brad handles much of the farming, Ben schedules most of the baling and hay production. A third brother, Spencer, plans to join the operation after college graduation. Loren, meanwhile, continues to oversee the operation, while managing the farming program for a local dairy.

Needless to say, the family has learned a few tricks of the trade through four generations of hay production. They were kind enough to share a few of those with us. Here's what they said.

Learn to Be Patient

According to Ben, timing is everything.

"We lay everything into 8-foot swaths with the windrowers," he explains. "In most cases, we'll come back in three days and rake two swaths into a windrower before baling it that night.

"Obviously, you don't want to let it dry too long before raking it, because you can shatter the leaves," he continues. "But a lot of people also rake too early; and that can be just as bad. If there's too much stem moisture left in the plants, it causes the windrows to collapse down on themselves and close off air circulation."

Diversify

Of the nearly 50,000 big square bales the family puts up each year, nearly a fifth of them are straw bales, while the rest are predominantly alfalfa bales. Although a portion of the crop goes to the export market, most of the straw and quality alfalfa goes to local dairies.

The family has also planted about 80 acres of the farm to Teff grass, which is marketed to a local calf producer. Originally bred in Ethiopia, Teff is described as a very "sweet" forage, which

sells for as much as \$180 per ton.

"In addition to approximately a thousand acres of hay, we also have about 200 acres of corn and 600 acres of wheat," Loren explains. "We use both of those as rotation crops, while we're giving fields a rest between crops of alfalfa."

Use the Right Equipment

"The equipment available today makes it easier to put up quality hay," Brad relates. "The new RazorBar™ headers on our Hesston by Massey Ferguson® windrowers are a good example. We used to have two sickle-type machines and one disc windrower," he explains. "When it came time for the last cutting, which is usually pretty thin, we'd just have to park the disc windrower. However, the new RazorBar features so many improvements for light crop feeding that we've now gone with all disc windrowers."