

Hay



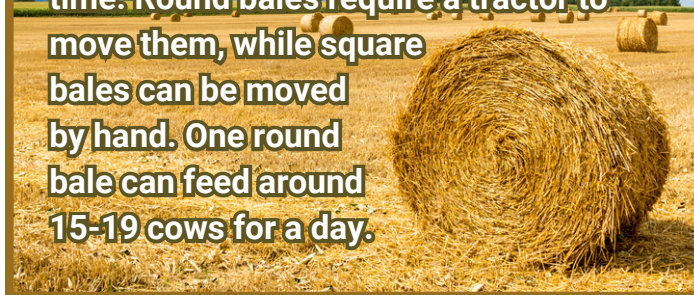
Hay is the product made when grasses, legumes, or other herbaceous plants have been cut, dried, and baled to feed to animals. Grass hay is made of long-stemmed grasses, just like your home or school lawn. About 280,000 acres of Illinois land are used to bale grass hay.

The term “hay” may also refer to alfalfa. Alfalfa, which is a legume that is higher in protein than grass, is baled just like grass hay. In Illinois, about 200,000 acres of land are used to bale alfalfa. Illinois produces 1.2 billion tons of hay products per year.



Hay products are harvested in a multi-step process. First, the grass is cut. Then, an attachment called a tedder fluffs up the cut grass to dry it out. Next, the grass is raked into rows. Finally, the baler rolls the hay into the desired size and shape - either round or square - and wraps it in a wrap or twine to keep its shape. The bales of hay are kept under a roof or with a cover on top to keep them out of the weather.

Hay products come in both round and square bales. Round bales are better for large-scale livestock farms because more animals can access the bale at once. Square bales can be easily broken down into smaller pieces, so these bales are good for feeding a few animals at a time. Round bales require a tractor to move them, while square bales can be moved by hand. One round bale can feed around 15-19 cows for a day.





Meet the Wackerlin Family

Leland, IL



Tell us about your farm.

I (Carolann) farm with my dad, Russell Wackerlin. Together, we bale about 50 acres of hay and alfalfa. We also plant 15-20 acres of winter wheat each year. In July, the wheat, the seed of the plant, is harvested with a combine and sold to a grain elevator, but we primarily plant wheat so we can bale straw, the stalk/stem portion of the plant.

What types of hay do you grow and when?

In Northern Illinois we grow cool season grasses, a mix of timothy and orchard grass with some brome and bluegrass. New hay fields are generally seeded in mid-August, but we can seed in late March to early April too because of how far North we are. We usually get 2 to 3 cuttings of hay per year between June and September. We also bale alfalfa, which grows at the same time of year, but produces much faster. We can expect 3 to 5 cuttings per year of alfalfa. The fields sit dormant over the winter until the grass begins to grow again the following spring. Once a grass hay field is established, it can produce forever as long as it is properly maintained. An alfalfa field, however, only produces for around 5 years before the field will need to be plowed & rotated to another crop.

How do you bale your hay?

Weather is the biggest factor when trying to make hay. We try to cut when we are anticipating days without rain so that the hay can dry properly between cutting and baling. Our farm only bales small squares, which are roughly 14"H x 18"W x 35"L and weigh around 50 pounds. Other common bale sizes include round bales that weigh anywhere from 700-1200 pounds and large square bales that weigh around 800 pounds. We still bale by hand, meaning that a person stands on a hay rack behind the tractor and baler and physically grabs every bale, walks it to the back of the rack and stacks every bale.



All photos on this page courtesy of Wackerlin Family Farms