



March 14, 2008

## HOW TO CERTIFY HAY OR STRAW

This year at the winter pesticide license meetings in Jefferson County that educator Paul Hay and I conducted, an issue was raised about certifying hay or straw. The Jefferson County Noxious Weeds Superintendent, John McKee, indicated local farmers missed out on an opportunity to sell certified straw needed for the Rocky Express pipeline project. With no local certified straw available for mulch to stabilize land with higher slope along the pipeline right-of-way, the company purchased certified straw many states away and transported it to Nebraska.

Local farmers did not receive any kind of heads up on the issue from company officials or the company that does environmental mitigation. All it takes is a local heads up and farmers can respond to needs for large projects in their community. I believe the Transcanada Keystone project will need to buy certified straw for mulch along areas in Nebraska including Saline County that have higher slopes along easements in late 2008 or 2009. So the question is raised, "What is certified straw or hay?"

Normally, when you think of selling hay, you think of dairy cows, beef cows, feedlots, or horses. But hay or straw is also used to feed wildlife in national parks and as mulch along many roadsides or other disturbed soils such as pipeline projects.

Selling hay for use in parks or on roadsides, though, can be a challenge, especially if your hay needs to cross state lines. That's because many state and federal agencies will refuse to buy your hay unless they can be guaranteed that it does not contain any noxious weeds. To prevent the spread of noxious weeds via hay, the North American Weed Free Forage Program has been established. This program has been adopted by most state Departments of Agriculture and is implemented in Nebraska by your county Weed Control Authority. In Saline County this is Lyle Weber.

To participate in Saline County, your forage must be inspected by Weber for noxious weeds or other designated weeds prior to cutting. If any are found, the hay still might be able to be certified if prescribed treatments are followed; these treatments will vary depending on the type of weed. Then, if your hay passes, you will receive an inspection certificate verifying the results. When shipping across state lines, a transit certificate or certification marking must accompany the hay to avoid rejection. Contact your local Weed Control Authority for more details.

Certifying hay as weed free can offer other markets for your hay. But act before cutting or it will be too late for Weber to help you. Planning in advance can pay big dividends. For the Noxious Weed Department in Saline County, call 821-3326, or email [salineweed@diodecom.net](mailto:salineweed@diodecom.net).

A possible contact for you is the mitigation company doing work for the Transcanada Keystone project. They are laying crude oil pipe in the Dakota's this spring and Lisa Larson can be reached at [lisal@mt.net](mailto:lisal@mt.net) or call 406-442-0950. She is a vegetation/reclamation specialist at Westtech Environmental Services.



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