

# Baling Hay

During the late summer in middle school and high school I would bale hay for local farmers.

Timing is probably the most important concept of baling hay. Baling hay is a race against Mother Nature. The summer months are very spotty when considering rain. The farmer needs to watch the weather before considering mowing a hay field. A large rain could ruin a hay field and the hay would be worthless. The hay should be baled before it is very brittle because it will lose leaves from the hay. Usually the hay is baled in the mid day because the hay is dry at that time. Towards evening the hay will dampen causing it to be tough for the baler to bale.

The farmer needs a lot of extra people to get all the hay baled in one or two days. Once they cut it they want to get it put away before the next rain. The workforce was neighboring farmers and kids like me. The farmers would often trade labor by working on each other's farm during the baling season.

The process was pretty straightforward. The farmer would have cut the hay a couple days before baling started so it could dry in the field. Then they would hitch up their hay baler to a tractor and pull it through the field picking up the hay. A baler is an implement that packs the hay into a bale that is either round or square and then ties it to hold the hay together. All the farms I worked on used square balers.

I had one of two jobs in this process. Usually two of us would ride on the wagon that was behind the baler and stack the bales as they came out of the baler. The bales are quite heavy and you end up stacking them 3 or 4 high on the wagon. Sometimes a couple of us would work in the hayloft stacking the hay bales. They bales got up in loft either by ridding up a corn escalator or via a hook/pulley system (this was the fun one). The challenge in the loft is carrying those heavy bales across a floor of stacked bales – your foot can slip down between two bales.

I liked baling hay for three basic reasons. First, there was a great sense of community during a hay baling session. You feel like you are on a team with an important mission. Second, they had the best lunches. Around 1pm everyone would come back to the farmhouse and there would be a huge lunch set out. Usually the women from the other farms would have helped cook the lunch. It always had great deserts, e.g. pies and cakes. Third, it paid well.

## INSIGHTS

I actually like to work hard; it gives me a real sense of accomplishment. I enjoy being part of a team, even if I am not the leader. I liked the way the farmers would organize everyone and all the equipment.