

# The Founders

The men who led the San Joaquin Valley Hay Growers Association in its first year included H.H. Grimes of Tracy, president, W.I. Neeley, Stockton, vice president, and L.W. Moran of Stockton, secretary/treasurer.

Other first year directors were W.A. Beckman, H.L. Rodgers, M.F. West, Lester Krohn, George Clever, Otto Muller, and Earl Hoff. The remaining charter members included three women, Daisy M. Distin and Clara Belle Carter of Stockton, and Florence L. Furry, Lodi. Also included were Ed Avila, S.W. Beckman, J.C. Beckman, George O. Brown, Raymond Colvin, George W. Emde, Waldo C. Haack, John Kirschenmann, A. Menconi, A.J. Pagel, G. O. Moore, Albert Muller, D. Muller, Peter G. Ohm, S. J. Purviance, B. L. Ratto, Alfred J. Rodgers, Joe G. Rodgers, Herman F. Strecker, Herman F. Strecker, Jr., C.R. Van Buskirk.

Their common experiences in farming through the depression led them to look for new ways to market their harvest.

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**“I started farming when I was 15 years old. I saw the conversion from the horse days into the tractor days and on into the swather and the pick-up baler. Working in the hay now isn’t anything like it used to be. It was all hand labor before.”** *Charter member and former president, Peter Ohm.*

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**“It got so we couldn’t sell our hay. We were trying to get \$8 a ton for it and couldn’t get it. And another thing, we’d sell the hay, and then it was hard to collect. We were busy raising hay. We didn’t have time to run around collecting for it.”** *Charter member and former president, the late Albert Muller.*

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**“I first started selling hay in 1931, and it brought \$8 a ton. In 1932 I sold one crop for \$7 a ton, delivered on the banks of the San Joaquin River. At \$7 a ton delivered on the banks, there wasn’t any money to pay all your bills.”** *Charter member and former president, the late Otto Miller.*

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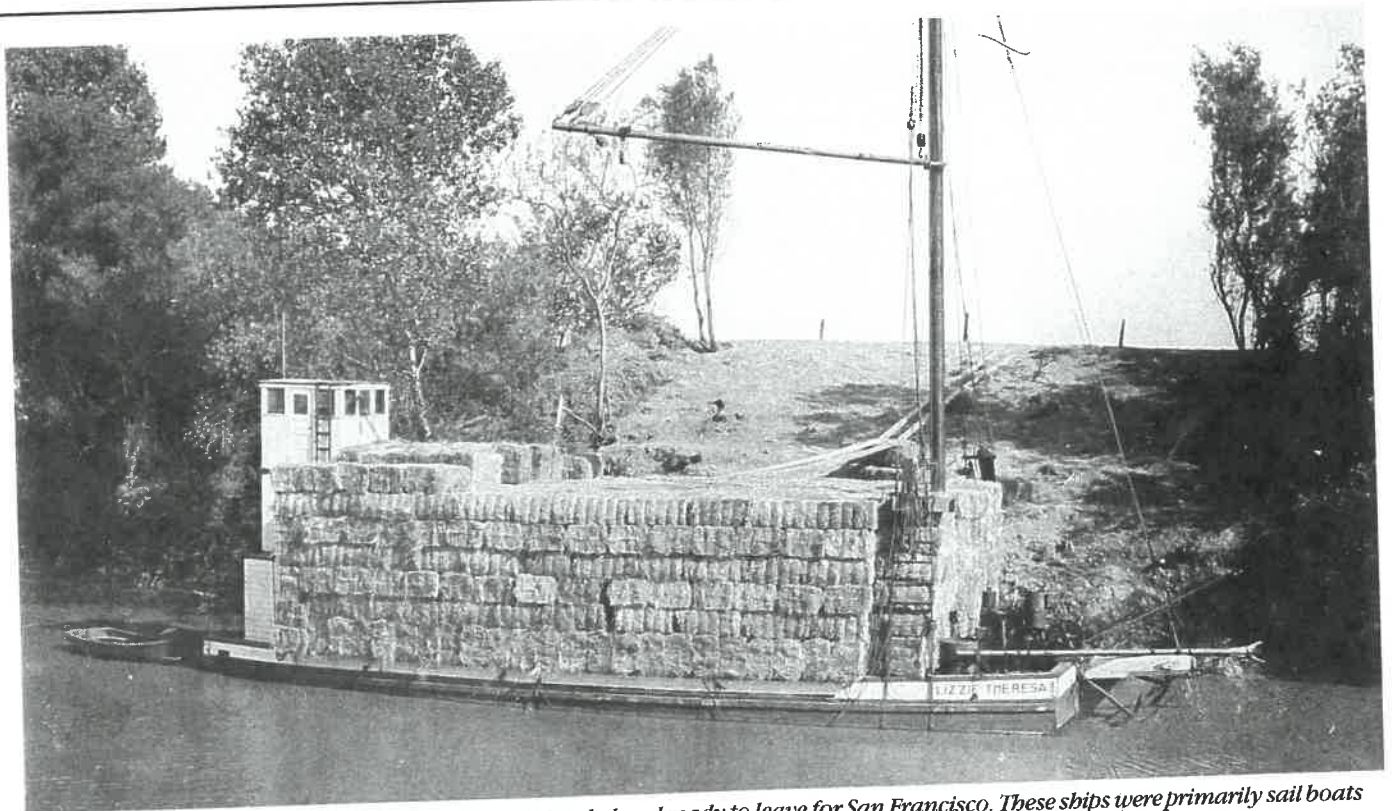
**“I remember one dealer who said he didn’t handle a ton of hay unless he was making \$3 a ton on it, and we thought he was making a little too much. So we got talking among ourselves about why we couldn’t form a marketing co-op and do it for a dollar or less.”** *Charter member and former Secretary/Treasurer, Lester Krohn.*

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**“Alfalfa sold for 8 and 9 dollars a ton, and you couldn’t grow it for that. Bill Straight came in there, and he was getting two and three dollars a ton more from the day he entered the picture.”** *Former president, the late Ted Ohlendorf.*

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*The Lizzie Theresa is a hay schooner in Elk Slough, loaded and ready to leave for San Francisco. These ships were primarily sail boats but were also equipped with small motors to get them in and out of tight places.*

# 1940 - Year of Decision

In the late 1930's, the situation facing hay growers in the San Joaquin Valley was rapidly becoming disastrous. Prices were down and each grower had to market his own product. It was a buyer's market for the few big dealers who dominated sales.

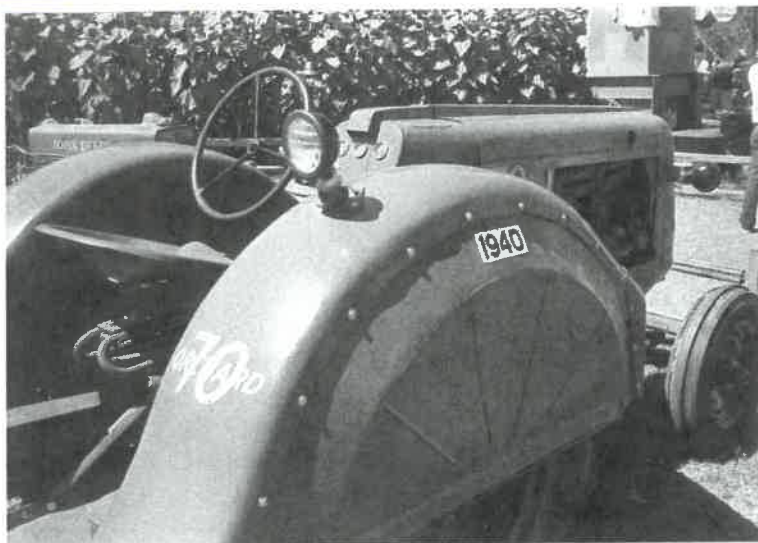
In March 1939, the members of the Hay Growers Division of the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau met and appointed a committee to investigate the feasibility of forming a Hay Growers Association. Otto Muller was chairman of the group, which also included Sam Peterman, Merrill F. West, S.W. Beckman and L.W. Moran.

After almost a year of study and investigation, the committee recommended the formation of the San Joaquin Valley Hay Growers Association, and the non-profit,

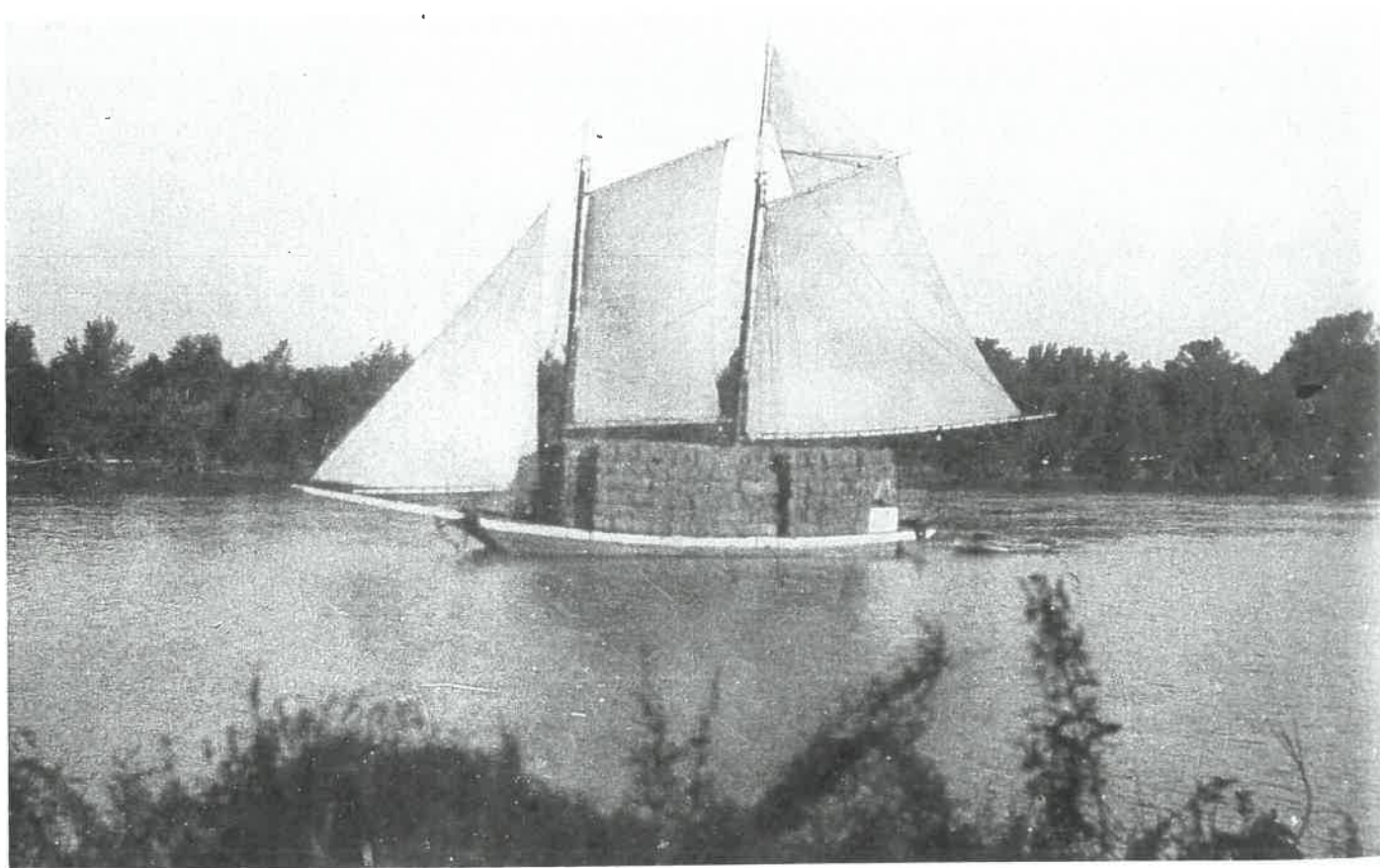
cooperative marketing association was formally formed in March, 1940 with 30 charter members. Harry Grimes was elected presi-

dent, with W.I. Neeley, vice president and L.W. Moran, Secretary/Treasurer.

*See Decision  
Page 11*



*This 1940 tractor was a luxury that few San Joaquin Valley farmers could afford. Horses were still widely used when the San Joaquin Valley Hay Growers Association was formed.*



*A load of hay under full sail on the Sacramento River was a familiar sight in the 1890's.*

## Decision

Continued from page 10

When the Association opened its first office in the Union Stockyards in Stockton, April 29, 1940, those 30 hay growers embarked on a highly competitive and hazardous undertaking. With a capital of \$3,753, consisting of cash and growers' notes, they obtained an unsecured loan of \$10,000 from the Berkeley Bank for Cooperatives, which also provided another loan of \$40,000, secured by growers' notes only. Of the two loans thus established, \$10,000 was used and repaid, and of the \$40,000 loan, \$25,296 was used and repaid at the end of the first fiscal year.

In planning, counseling and providing the necessary finances to permit operation, the Berkeley Bank for Cooperatives gave invaluable support to the new association and contributed greatly to its successful start.

A key move in the first month of operations was the decision to hire



*An office in the Union Stockyards in Stockton was home for the San Joaquin Valley Hay Growers Association from 1940 to 1947.*

William E. Straight as manager and S.K. Neal as Assistant Manager. Straight served as Manager and later as Executive Vice President until his death in 1967. He provided the leadership and authority to put the association on a sound, businesslike basis from the first year of its existence and established the operating policies that have helped it to become the largest and most successful hay marketing association in the world.

The San Joaquin Valley Hay Growers Association has benefitted from a continuity of leadership in both its Board of Directors and

management. Six of the 30 charter members later served terms as president of the organization. S.K. Neal, who followed William Straight as General Manager, served from 1940 to 1973. Leonard Cary, Neal's successor, started as a branch manager in 1945 and retired as Executive Secretary in 1983. The present Executive Secretary and General Manager, Mel Coelho, joined the association as field representative in 1965 and was named manager in 1979.

In its early years, the San Joaquin

*See Decision  
Page 12*

*From One Pioneer to Another . . .*

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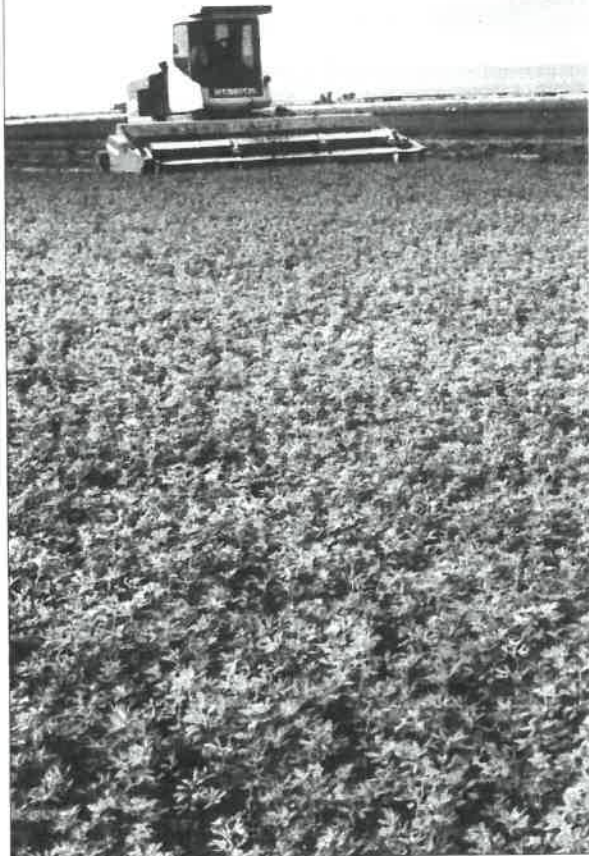
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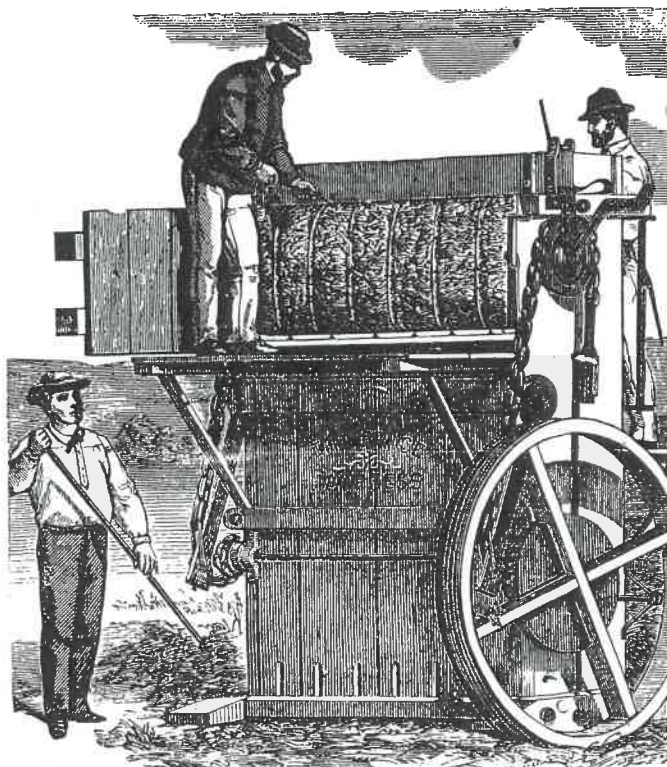
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## Decision

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Valley Hay Growers Association had sure and steady growth despite the marketing complications caused by government price controls during World War II. During that time hay had to be sold by government grade and under government inspection, but by 1945 total tonnage marketed had risen to 70,630, compared to the start-up year total of 16,210.

The San Joaquin Valley and all of California saw rapid change take place after the war. The original headquarters in Stockton proved to be too small for the growing organization, and in 1947 the Hay Growers moved into their present headquarters in Tracy. It was time to start dealing with the continuing challenges brought about by changes in equipment, cultural practices and marketing.



*The "Petaluma Press" was a familiar sight in San Joaquin Valley fields in the late 19th century. This model was hand-operated, others used horse power. (Photo courtesy of agricultural historian C.K. Koster)*

# Decades of Change

In its first decade of growth, the San Joaquin Valley Hay Growers Association saw total tonnage marketed go from 16,210 in 1940 to 122,675 in 1950. Total dollar sales rose from \$168,803 to \$2,540,255. Growth was even more impressive in the next decade, rising to 214,644 tons and a dollar volume of \$5,983,583 and later in 1989 to \$18,000,000.

These and subsequent years saw widespread change in marketing operations and cultural practices. The most dramatic change took place in harvesting. Baling and raking machines became self-propelled. A 12-16 foot mowing machine known as a "Swather" came on the market and revolutionized harvesting by mowing and conditioning in the same step, sometimes allowing a crop to be cured and baled within four days of

swathing. This was a far cry from the days when hay was mowed with a mowing machine pulled by two horses or even from later years when a tractor replaced the horses.

In the 1960's the automatic bale wagon entered California hay fields, enabling one man to pick up and load bales from field to truck. In the late sixties the Roadrunner Squeeze was developed, which allowed one man to pick up a full harrow bed stack of bales from a truck and move it quickly to a customer's lot or barn.

The Hay Growers Association took part in this evolution of machines and worked on some of its own. Bill Straight and Evert Rankin started work in the late 50's on the first Haypax machine which compressed bales to half their original size in order to ship more hay in a box car. The idea was aban-

doned when the cubing machine came on the scene in the early 60's. The cubes were first processed by stationary machines, which converted the hay into wafers about four inches square; especially suited for the growing export trade in containers. Self-propelled models followed, and the industry settled on the cube. The idea of double compressed bales lay dormant for more than twenty years.

In the 1980's there was a new demand for long fibre hay in a size that would be suitable for container loading, and the San Joaquin Valley Hay Growers Association resurrected its haypax idea. This time a completely new system was developed in cooperation with Evert Rankin and by the late 1980's it was producing double-com-

*See Change  
Page 15*



*William E. Straight first manager of the San Joaquin Valley Hay Growers Association.*

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*Best Wishes  
to the  
San Joaquin Valley  
Hay Growers  
on your  
Association's  
Golden Anniversary.*

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## Message from Sales Manager Rick Staas

Our primary goal is to market members' hay products at the highest possible price. Marketing is far from an exact science. In the past 50 years however, many pioneers have succeeded in making this Association a price setting force in the San Joaquin Valley and the largest Hay Marketing Cooperative in the world.

Today the market place is more complicated than in the past; largely due to changed buying habits. Most Dairymen require hay test analysis prior to purchasing and a large variance of quality is available and on the market. Your Association matches these varying demands to the end user at top market value for quality received.

The dairy industry still serves as the largest market for our hay, concentrated in San Joaquin County, Stanislaus County and Merced County. A declining market in the Petaluma dairy sheds and increasing herds moving to the central valley from Chino and Los Angeles have helped bolster our local market.

While total member tonnage has declined since the late '60's and early '70's due to a decline in statewide alfalfa acreage, total dollar value and prices per ton have risen dramatically. The expansion of foreign markets and full use of domestic markets have helped keep demand strong.

The immediate future looks bright for the alfalfa grower, however, new problems must be overcome. Government regulations and new pesticide and herbicide restrictions will no doubt bring about changes and concerns. Together, with increased land and water costs, higher returns must be maintained for growers to keep alfalfa a viable and profitable crop.

## Meeting a Crisis

Alfalfa growing in the San Joaquin Valley in the first half of this century was Old California Common, the same variety that came to San Francisco from Chile in 1854. It was the basic variety of hay grown in the valley, green, tall, and a heavy producer.

That changed in 1954 when the spotted Alfalfa aphid entered the valley. In the course of a single season, growth was curtailed, harvests were greatly restricted, and one of California's most important crops was threatened with destruction.

Scientists at the University of

California, Davis met the threat by developing a new variety of Alfalfa known as Lahonton, bred to resist the Aphid. At the same time they developed a second variety known as Moapa. The several varieties grown for the market today were bred from those two strains.

While Old California Common had a long productive history, it could not have met today's market demand for a higher quality hay. As often is the case in agriculture, the threat posed by the spotted Alfalfa Aphid led to the development of new varieties of hay far superior to the old.



*The Roadrunner Squeeze, developed in the late 60's allows one man to pick up a full harrow bed stack of bales and move it quickly and efficiently.*

### **Change** *continued from page 13*

pressed bales for the export market. This past season the Association marketed over 18,000 tons of cubes and double-compressed hay with a market value of \$2,475,892, representing 14% of the cooperative's dollar volume.

Cubing alfalfa hay continues in the San Joaquin Valley and promises to become an even more sig-

nificant factor in marketing. The product remains in good demand for its high density and ease of handling. It contains all the minerals and protein necessary to feed beef and lactating animals for maximum production. A steady supply of Alfalfa cubes from the valley travels to Oakland, where it is transloaded for shipment to customers in Japan, Korea, and other Pacific Rim countries.