Because of its importance among forage crops, alfalfa (*Medicago sativa* L.) is referred to as "Queen of Forages".

In Yuma County 2009 alfalfa acreage totaled 28,000 acres, grossing over $31 million.

In 2009, the average alfalfa yield in the Yuma area was over 9.5 tons per acre.

The 2009 Arizona alfalfa acreage was 230,000 acres with average yields of 8.4 tons per acre per year.

Alfalfa is one of the most important forages for livestock. It is the most important "high quality" forage crop because of its high protein, vitamins, energy, and digestibility.

Alfalfa is used as a high quality component of forage mixtures and allows use of lower quality forages in rations.

It is also important for soil enrichment, soil water holding capacity improvement, mulch, and extraction of deep minerals and nitrogen.

Alfalfa is a perennial crop, which means it will grow for several years after planting.

Alfalfa seeds are so small (1-2 millimeters), slightly wider than the tip of a pencil lead, there are about 200,000 alfalfa seeds per pound.

The roots of an alfalfa plant can grow deeper than 15 feet, making it an excellent choice for sandy soil conditions.

Alfalfa plants are vigorous and can re-grow many times after the tops are cut for hay, around 10 times per year, in the Yuma area.

Alfalfa is harvested with a swather, which cuts off the crop a few inches above the ground and places it in strips three to five feet wide where it dries in the sun.

An average bale weighs about 50 pounds.

When cut alfalfa is dry enough, the hay is raked and a baler is used to gather it up and compress it into a bale.

Legumes such as alfalfa convert atmospheric nitrogen into forms that plants can use.

Among United States crops, alfalfa is third in value, after corn and soybeans.

Unlike other commercial crops, alfalfa does not need nitrogen fertilizer.

Alfalfa is considered the premier forage of dairy cows. Thus, much of the milk, yogurt, cheese, cream, dried milk and ice cream we eat are connected to alfalfa.

The haymaking process is highly mechanized, and most hay goes from field to barn without being touched by human hands.

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