

Steve Berning owner of Galusha Farm in Warrenville, IL. DuPage County had a complete hay barn fire on November 19, 2018. The total loss included 31,000 small square bales (775 tons) and a dozen round bales. It included the shop, office, parts, tools, 3 antique tractors and all memorabilia. No livestock or people were injured. The situation has been and continues to be heartbreaking, as this was a significant source of revenue for the last 2 months and the next 4 months. What is more, is all the hard work to build the barn in 1991 and its new addition in 2008, literally went up in flames.

### **What caused the fire?**

Several investigators have established that the cause is “undetermined” for now. **Interestingly enough, the investigator’s report stated that it was unlikely to be spontaneous combustion** due to the hay. The fire started in the hay, not the shop or the office. The electrical was in tip-top condition, all in conduit with no disrepair, and installed professionally by a licensed electrician. Steve’s gut feeling is arson, even though the security cameras did not show any suspicious activity from the front and east side of the barn. There are no suspects at this time. Regarding hay causing a potential fire, the concern is real. It is something Galusha Farm has always taken seriously.

A 3 step process to prevent hay barn fires has been in place for many years.

1. **Measure**: Galusha Farm bales with a continuous moisture monitor in the cab of the tractor (the number one way to have a fire is to bale wet hay).
  - a. A code is produced for the hay we bale each day, which includes the moisture range.
  - b. The day’s hay code is printed and applied to each bundle ... on the steel bands that hold 21 bales in a bundle.
    - i. Everyone on the haying crew sees the code via text messaging, immediately.
      1. **Hay does NOT ship to the customer unless it is safe.**
2. **Monitor**: If marginally high moisture hay is determined, probes are used to check the temperature and pull a sample from the center.
  - a. Bales are monitored for potentially high temperatures, until safe storage levels can be determined.
    - i. Knowing the particular hay storage facility type (barn and ventilation) is important to cure good hay **and** prevent hay fire potentials.
3. **Control & mitigate**: If the temperature does not go down and continues to rise, bale bundles are removed from harms-way and are sold as mulch or are fed right away. These bales are very good hay to feed if opened up to breath/ventilate before damage takes place to the quality of the hay.

### **What's happening now and your plan going forward:**

The Galusha Farm hay barn will be rebuilt! A contract will be signed the last week of January 2019. (place your intentions or orders now for the sake of a comfort level – for all 😊). All the clean-up was completed in early January and done mostly by Galusha Farm and family members. Fortunately the fire department allowed the fire to burn to completion, in order to minimize the amount of wet hay to be removed. Can you imagine hauling out 775 tons of wet hay?

For insurance reimbursement purposes, logging all farm personal property items is ongoing. This is a daunting task, sifting through steel and ashes to segregate items for individual pictures, to put on computer spreadsheets, showing proof of ownership...and tying these all together with common computer search words for ease of the insurance adjuster. It is worth the effort.

Starting April 1<sup>st</sup> Galusha Farm will begin to erect a new barn by FBi Buildings from Remington, IN. They built the 1991 pole building that was lost and FBi did a phenomenal job. If the new barn is not ready when 1<sup>st</sup> cutting comes in May, Galusha Farm will use more Air Barn bags (3,000 bale bags for dry hay [www.AirBarn.com](http://www.AirBarn.com)) to accommodate the “old” barn storage as well as round bales that can be stored outside with net wrapping, for better quality.

### **How have you and your customers adapted to not having the hay now? Especially with quality dry hay being in demand!**

This was a bad time to have a hay barn fire, as the availability of small square bales are few and far between! Of course there is never a good time to have a hay barn fire 😊. The challenge has been to try and help customers find any type of hay. All 31,000 bales were pre-sold & spoken for (and not paid for) so the challenge was huge. The 1<sup>st</sup> step taken was to contact the affected customers and advise them of who they could start calling to hopefully find some hay this winter, as our contacts have already been sold out. As hay sources are identified, Galusha Farm assists customers in securing that hay, hauling it for our customers or buying and reselling, if and when appropriate.

Today, I have run across hay in a wrap that is supposed to be very good for horses!

1. 3' x 4' x 7-8' large square
2. Generically called “Baleage”
3. Excellent for horses
4. Great quality
5. Delivery available immediately.
6. Priced fair
7. Comes to me from Michigan, from a new farmer friend I just made.
8. I have details and a hay analysis report available.

Many customers went to round bales, large square bales and out of state to do what they had to do. Not a fun problem for feeders to have in the winter months.

Galusha Farm hopes to retain its customers as mutual trust and need has already been established!

**Advice you give to others**

1. Smile, it could be worse and count your blessings!
2. Be observant.
3. Know what you are doing, or ask someone who does.
4. Read and re-read the above article and contact Steve Berning at Galusha Farm with questions that apply to your specific situation.

Happy Trails,

Steve Berning 630-878-6350 [www.GalushaFarm.com](http://www.GalushaFarm.com) and **fb**