



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## Hay growers face payment problems with unlicensed hay dealers

**OLYMPIA** – With costs of hay often surpassing \$200 a ton, more hay growers and buyers are voicing concern about the actions of hay dealers who are not licensed and bonded by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

WSDA investigators have handled about 40 complaints during this year's hay season, dealing with concerns over payment, quality or quantity issues. Complaints have come from growers and consumers from both Eastern and Western Washington.

The value of disputed hay sales reported to WSDA is more than \$180,000 this year.

"We've been hearing from hay growers about not receiving payment from dealers who aren't licensed," said Kirk Robinson, manager of the WSDA's Commission Merchants Program. "Some producers have been duped out of thousands of dollars. Our goal is to resolve payment disputes and get growers paid quickly."

Robinson urged growers to do business with buyers they have confidence in and to make sure the method of payment is agreed upon before the hay leaves the farm.

"The most important step that a grower can take to protect themselves is to deal with a licensed and bonded hay dealer," Robinson said. "For commercial-size loads, we encourage growers to call us to see if there's a history of complaints on the buyer."

WSDA is increasing surveillance and enforcement activity for violations of Commission Merchants Act laws involving agricultural products. The Washington State Hay Growers Association has been advised of the problem, and the situation will be discussed at the Commission Merchants Program Advisory Committee meeting in Ellensburg Nov. 15.

Violators of the Commission Merchants Act may be issued a civil infraction that carries a penalty of up to \$10,250 per violation. WSDA also has the option of pursuing criminal charges if illegal activities have occurred. Growers can call WSDA at (509) 249-6961 in Yakima or (360) 902-1854 in Olympia to discuss a problem.

Growers also can check on the WSDA Web site to verify the license of a hay dealer. Go to [www.agr.wa.gov](http://www.agr.wa.gov) and click on inspection services and then Commission Merchants.

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