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Schuyler Town Talk: Hay processing company at Seneca depot plans May 15 start

ROMULUS -- After raising the needed money and putting a lengthy processing line in place last year, Top Quality Hay Processors are ready to get down to business.

In a spacious warehouse at the former Seneca Army Depot, the company has its heart set on turning out 4,800 tons of hay this year. That's 250,000 40-pound bales.

Jeff Warren, one of the owners, looks for a May 15 start-up. Five farmers have thus far committed their hay acreage. To meet its 4,800 tons, Top Quality wants to buy 650 acres of standing hay within 25 miles of its Romulus locale.

Those farmers contracting with Top Quality will not have to raise a finger when harvest time rolls around or count on Mother Nature for the drying of their crop.

Top Quality will do the harvesting, transporting, drying and baling. As the crop is cut, it's loaded aboard a truck for transport to the warehouse and drying there. Farmers are to be paid on a per ton basis.

The system, Warren points out, never allows a crop to touch the ground. The nutrient value is preserved by getting a crop inside and out of damaging weather. Instead of a four or five-day drying period in the field, Top Quality does the drying in its production line in a matter of four hours and thus retains color and nutritional value and also avoids dust, mold and leaf loss.

Warren, a Penn Yan resident, and his partners have invested \$3.9 million in an innovative 385-foot-long system of ovens, conveyor belts and other equipment, and they are thinking in terms of a second production line expected to cost about \$2.5 million. There is room in the Romulus warehouse for additional lines.

Warren said his dream is to see hay processing systems spread across the state.

"Farmers would benefit and so would local residents in need of work," he said.

During his open house, there were nearly 30 people inquiring about franchise possibilities. Top Quality intends to hire about 20 people, field crew, truck drivers and production line crew, to turn out about 40 tons of hay daily.

Top Quality, after putting its production line together last year, produced 2,000 bales of hay and used some of those bales for demonstration purposes during the open house, which attracted more than 200 people including some Canadian farmers.

Eyed as potential customers, Warren said, are the equine and dairy industries and the state of Florida. "There is a shortage of good quality hay in Florida as well as other parts of the U.S.," he said.

There is more information at www.tqhp.com or at 869-3477.