

***2008 Fourth Annual
JIM KUHN LEADERSHIP AWARD***

California Alfalfa & Forage Association
Representing the Forage Growers of California

MEL COELHO - AN INDUSTRY ICON



The California Alfalfa & Forage Assn. is pleased to present its fourth annual Jim Kuhn Leadership award posthumously to Mel Coelho who passed away in August of 2008. Mel leaves a void that will be difficult to fill. The Leadership Award was established by CAFA in 2005 to honor the memory of Imperial County grower Jim Kuhn, an innovator and tireless advocate on behalf of the California alfalfa and forage industry.

Coelho is widely recognized for his lasting contributions to California's alfalfa industry during a career that spanned 37 years with the San Joaquin Valley Hay Growers Assn., Tracy, CA. Mel began working for the Assn. in 1966 as the manager of the Los Banos Branch before moving to the main office in Tracy. In 1978 he became the Hay Growers General Manager and then served as the Assn.'s Executive Vice President from 1998 to 2003 when he retired

Over the years Coelho donated his time to serve the alfalfa industry and was a key figure in helping establish CAFA. He was an industry liaison to the Feed Advisory Committee of the California Grain and Feed Assn. and served as a hay industry representative for the California Farm Bureau Federation. He was also on the committee that changed hay grading standards in California.

A frequent speaker at Alfalfa Symposiums, Coelho was sought out by many Midwestern groups interested in setting up hay marketing organizations. The San Joaquin Valley Haygrowers Assn. is the largest hay marketing group in California.

In keeping with his commitment to the alfalfa and forage industry, Coelho joined growers and other industry members who met with author Marc Reisner, a well-known Marin County, CA environmentalist. In his book, Cadillac Desert, Reisner labeled alfalfa as one of several low-value high water using crops that should not be grown in California.

The concerns Coelho and other industry members expressed after the meeting led to the formation of CAFA in 1998. He played an important role in getting CAFA funded and established, and served on the Board of Directors until his retirement from the SJV Hay Growers Assn. in 2003. He spent many long hours with Tom Ellis, Jim Kuhn, Joe Rominger, Dan Putnam, and other founders writing the by-laws, developing the founding documents.

His presence on the CAFA Board and the in-depth knowledge he shared was a major asset and his many contributions were especially valuable to the Assn. during the formative years. Manuel Melvin "Mel" Coelho was laid to rest on August 11, 2008 and is survived by his wife Donna of Turlock, CA, his mother Virginia Pederes also of Turlock, and numerous family members, including 13 grandchildren. At the funeral, Rick Stass, SJV Hay Growers President, paid homage to Mel and offered the following poem that he wrote:

FOR MEL

(Rick Staas)

Mel's tenure in the hay business started in 1966,
He worked long and hard that year plus another 36.

The Hay Growers Assn. is synonymous with Mel,
He worked up through the ranks and did very well.

He loved his job and brought the company great success,
His skill in business and relationships was his finesse.

He brought farmers together in five western states,
Helping California growers benefit from what he creates.

He was instrumental in changing how hay was graded,
And to this day, those standards are how hay is traded.

His policy at the office was always open door,
A great management style his employees would adore.

I bugged him daily until he finally hired me in 1982,
For a while I'm sure he thought I didn't have a clue.

He was always behind me when I didn't know what to do,
He had great guidance and always said "do what is true".

Mel always enjoyed lunch and a cocktail with a good friend,
All his friends, I'm sure, wish those days wouldn't end.

Old Douglas Market and Banta Inn was where we liked to play,
One is still there, one is not, but we remember the day.

When Mel retired we gave him a Wal-Mart greeter vest,
The party that day, the laughs, they were the best.

Mel was a personal guy that everyone respected,
Good people like him deserve to be resurrected.

I will miss our time together and remember what I learned,
The lessons I was taught and the knowledge that I earned.

Thank you Mel for all the great times that we had,
Your positive influence came through in times both good and bad.

So I ask everyone here to give a cheer for Hay Mel,
A great boss, a good friend, we'll miss you, farewell.