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Revived Griffith and Avoca export hay sites...  
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# Griffith and Avoca export hay sites hungry for supply



Marian Macdonald

@milkmaidmarian

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Hay export sites brought to their knees, one by Chinese authorities and the other by a political scandal, have bounced back and locals at Avoca and Griffith say the only thing holding them back now is finding enough hay and staffers.

Pyrenees Hay's Avoca site in Victoria's west was among the 25 of Australia's 28 hay export facilities whose licences were not renewed by China in February 2021, forcing the site to close for a couple of months.

Just weeks earlier in December 2020, Pyrenees Hay had bought a shuttered hay exporting site at Griffith, making it the only export hay supplier in the NSW Riverina and one of the three remaining sites in the country licensed to export hay to China.

The plant had been closed for a couple of years but not before disgraced NSW politician Daryl Maguire got entangled in the attempted rescue of its part-owner, UWE, which went into liquidation in 2018.

Despite all that, the owners, a small group of farmers and export firm Standard Commodities, have engineered a turnaround for both sites that is now only limited by the availability of hay and employees.

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The Griffith site has already grown from dispatching four 40-foot shipping containers of oaten hay a week to China to nine or more, site manager Troy Evans said.

"We've basically doubled production since it reopened in April and we want to get bigger, we're just looking for more farmers to grow hay for us," he said.

The staff at Pyrenees Hay tease out and blend hay supplies to match the nutritional specifications of individual orders.

General manager Julie Bartlett said it allowed the company to accept a wide range of hay supplies.

She said the main requirements were a feed test showing water-soluble carbohydrate (WSC) of at least 18 per cent and neutral detergent fibre of no more than 56pc.

Slightly moisture affected hay could often be worked in with higher quality hay and Pyrenees Hay always helped its growers find buyers for hay that didn't make the grade.

But there is one constraint: the monster 20-metre-long, 15m-high machine that bales and then wraps the hay at Griffith is only set up for the format favoured by the Chinese market.

Mr Evans hopes increased production will allow Pyrenees Hay to justify the purchase of a second machine, which would allow it to more readily pursue other international markets.

Indeed, while Standard Commodities' Bronson Livingston expects the easing of travel restrictions will soon allow Chinese officials to inspect and recertify the Avoca facility, new markets have been found for its hay.

So much so, Avoca is exporting more now than ever.

Topping the list of destinations are Korea and Taiwan, Mr Livingston said, and the first shipment to Japan is scheduled for next month.

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It also sends about 400 tonnes a week of faba beans, lentils, and various grades of wheat around the world to countries like Egypt, Nepal, Indonesia, Taiwan, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Between the two facilities, Pyrenees Hay employs about 30 people and deals with around 100 growers.

Col Helson, who grows oaten hay at his Colinroobie and Stony Point properties near Leeton, NSW, said the reopening of the Griffith facility was good news for locals.

He's always sold the 3000-4000 tonnes he harvests each year to the domestic market but said the arrival of Pyrenees Hay made selling to the export market, with its \$20-\$40 a tonne premium an attractive alternative for top-quality hay lines.

"It puts a bit of a floor in the market," Mr Helson said.

"It means you don't have to take the domestic price when you've got an exporter close to you and you don't have to pay a lot of freight to get the hay there."

The exporters also offered payment for storage, which he said was an extra \$15-\$20 a tonne.

If you've got 3000 tonnes sitting in the shed at \$15 a tonne for X amount of months, it does help a little bit and the domestic market doesn't do that," Mr Helson said.

"I think Pyrenees Hay reopening Griffith's a great thing for the Riverina. I hope some of the farmers get behind it."

Even so, it would take time to overcome the "bad taste left in the mouths of growers" brought by UWE's collapse, Mr Helson said.

Ms Bartlett said Pyrenees Hay was working hard to build relationships with growers in the NSW Riverina.

"We're trying to get the name out there and rebuild everyone's confidence," she said.

"If they sell hay to us, they're going to get paid on time."

Even when the loss of the Chinese market for the Avoca plant forced its temporary closure, Ms Bartlett said, Pyrenees Hay had honoured all its contracts with growers.

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