

## Along with The Tobin Tree: **Haying**

On western ranches, water is often delivered to the fields by a gravity-run system. The source, in the case of the Sweetwater Ranch, is the river. Each ranch must own water rights to a specific amount of water. Water rights were established in the late 1800's and were the source of many heated disagreements in western communities. Water was as valuable as gold!



The water enters the irrigation system from the source through a head gate. The gate can be adjusted by turning the wheel, which raises and lowers the iron 'gate'. The amount of flow is determined by the amount of water legally allowed.

Once water is in the system, gravity causes it to flow downhill through a network of ditches. Keeping the ditches free of silt and other obstructions is a time-consuming part of this style of irrigation. The advantage, however, is its simplicity. The ditch is blocked or dammed, causing the water to flood into the field. Then the dam is moved along, and a new area of the field is flooded. Tools required are a shovel for clearing silt and a sturdy piece of canvas to block the flow.



This picture shows a flooded area toward the end of the system where the ditches are smaller and more shallow.



When the grass is mature it is ready to be cut, raked, baled, and stacked.

The hay is turned in the hot sun to dry before it is baled.

It is important to avoid baling wet hay which can mold or generate internal heat.

This field has been cut and raked and is ready to be baled.

In this picture, a baler is finishing up a field. The bales on this ranch are rectangular shaped, weighing 60-100 pounds each. They can be picked up onto a hay sled or flatbed by hand.



In the story, John pulled the hay sled behind the jeep. He drove along slowly as Pete and Daniel, on the sled, reached out and snagged the bales with hay hooks. When the sled was filled, it was pulled to the stack and unloaded.

Tobin wanted to ride on the sled and pick up bales, too, but she couldn't even lift one when she tried. Snagging bales required some serious muscle!



The loaded sled was driven to Cal at the conveyor where the bales were stacked and covered with a tarp to keep them dry.



Stacking bales is hard work, and is done carefully. The bales are stacked in a pattern to ‘tie’ them together, not with rope, but just with their weight. Well-placed bales ensure a stable stack.

In the story, Tobin sometimes climbed to the top of the stack to sit and look out over the field.

The hay is often sold to other ranchers for their livestock. Some hay may be kept and stored in the loft of the barn, or left in a stack at the edge of the field.



On large ranches, hay is rolled into huge bales that are lifted and moved by machines.

They definitely are not moved by hand!

If you are interested in learning more about haying, I suggest [farmingmagazine.com](http://farmingmagazine.com). There is an article called **Haying 101**. And there are YouTube videos showing baling and stacking.

