

Drought-Damaged Soybeans Can Make Cattle Feed

MU Economist Has Calculator For Hay:Bean Value

COLUMBIA, MO.

Soybeans that won't make a seed crop offer potential high-quality forage for beef and dairy producers. The decision to cut beans for hay won't be easy, say University of Missouri Extension specialists.

"It will be difficult to tell when there is no potential for a seed crop," said Bill Wiebold, MU soybean specialist.

"Waiting too late to cut soybeans for forage decreases feeding quality," said Justin Sexten MU beef nutritionist.

Joe Horner, MU Extension economist, developed a spread sheet for producers to put in their own numbers to figure value for forage.

Horner said the cut off for the transition from beans to forage is when yield drops below 10 bushels of soybeans per acre; and if forage provides one ton or more of quality dry matter per acre.

There is potential for tons of needed forage, Horner adds. The Missouri crop condition report showed 3.7 million acres of the 5.3 million acres of soybeans planted this year rated poor or very poor as of July 29.

The first step on the way to hay, Horner said, is a visit with the crop insurance adjuster. "Don't cut anything, without checking crop coverage."

Rob Kallenbach, MU forage specialist, said soybeans now have the potential for a feeding value equal to full-bloom alfalfa hay. Currently that hay sells for \$200 per ton. High quality alfalfa brings \$300.

Wiebold said judging potential for soybean yield will be more difficult than for corn. "Corn makes one attempt at making an ear and that is over in a few days. The soybean keeps setting blossoms for 30 to 40 days, trying to make pods. A late rain can increase bean yields.

"A lot depends on who owns the soybean field and if they need forage," Wiebold said.

All the specialists caution producers to read

the label on any pesticide used on the soybean crop during the growing season. The most widely used soybean herbicide is glyphosate (RoundUp). It has a 14-day-waiting period before harvest for forage. However, most herbicides require much longer periods between application and harvesting of soybeans for forage.

In his spreadsheet example posted on the MU AgEBB website, Horner used a value of \$16 per bushel for soybeans. And a value of \$164 per dry matter ton of forage.

Justin Sexten said timing for cutting soybean plants for forage will be critical. Leaves on the mature and dried soybean plant shatter and fall quickly. Nothing but stems is left after maturity.

Wiebold said transition from what looks like a good crop and a dead crop can be just a few days.

The MU specialists agree on one thing. Making soybean hay isn't easy. The favored way to harvest soybean plants is as high-moisture hay, wrapped in plastic. Balage makes high quality forage with less leaf loss.

After using the new soybean spreadsheet, Kallenbach said there are some clear breaks. A yield above 10 bushels per acre favors harvest of soybeans. However, yields below five bushel per acre clearly show more value as forage. "Other factors can change the decision between five and 10 bushels per acre. That won't be an easy decision."

Wiebold said, "Once you make a decision to cut soybean for forage, or to harvest beans, do not look back. There's a good chance you will think you made a wrong decision, either way."

In a drought teleconference call, Bradley, the weed specialist, had the last word. "Read the label, before harvesting soybeans for forage."

Horner's soybean spreadsheet can be found listed under "Silage" at <http://www.agebb.missouri.edu/dairy/feed/>. Δ



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