

Evaluating Forage Quality

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Forages are one of the most versatile feeds available to beef operations. They can be utilized in several different manners, such as pasture, hay, baleage, silage, and stock-piled forages. When managed properly, several forage species provide quality nutrients to livestock. The ultimate test of hay/forage quality is how well animals perform. Additionally, matching forage quality to animal needs can help minimize feed costs while getting optimum production out of your animals.

In order to match forage quality to animal needs, forages are usually first evaluated in the field by color, leaf content, maturity, contamination from undesirable plants in the stand, insect and disease issues. While these evaluations are important, they do not give producers adequate nutritional information regarding their forages. For around \$13 to \$18, producers

can get their forages analyzed by nutritional labs and learn exactly what nutritional value their forages will provide to their livestock.

With the significant price increases in grain products and the current low supply of stored forages in the area, producing high-quality forages and knowing the value of these forages will allow producers to better utilize their high quality forages in a more efficient manner. Furthermore, research shows storage and feeding losses with big round bales stored outside can exceed 30 percent. With these thoughts in mind here are a few final tips. The best and most profitable forage programs usually have the most thought, time, management and effort put into them, increasing the chances of getting the results you are striving for. Δ

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