

Hay Feeding Options To Stretch Short Hay Supplies

Feeding hay in rings can cut waste in half

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Arkansas' drought has made hay in short supply and what's available is expensive, raising the importance of stretching every ounce, said John Jennings, professor-forage for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

"Offers of hay from southeastern states are coming in daily and most of that hay is reasonably priced," he said. "But transportation cost can more than double the hay cost."

Jennings, and Shane Gadberry, associate professor-ruminant nutrition, offered some tactics to help stretch what hay is available.

"Hay that will not be fed until winter should be protected from weathering during storage," Jennings said. "Many people don't have adequate barn storage for large amounts of hay."

Hay can be stacked outside, but for long-term storage, Jennings said to make sure the hay is up off the ground and covered.

"It can be stacked on pallets, poles, large crushed rock, or even tires," he said. "However, don't use damaged or rotted pallets or tires with exposed steel belting. These could result in metal contaminants and potential 'hardware disease'."

"Hardware disease" is the name given to the group of digestive system problems that can be caused by eating metal objects mixed in with feed, including punctured organs.

Jennings also that when it comes to covering the hay, cheap is as cheap does. "These cheap blue tarps are not UV protected and will fall apart within a few months of exposure to wind and direct sunshine," he said.

Research has shown that cows can consume most of their hay intake during the first few hours of access to the hay, said Gadberry. With that in mind, producers can try limiting the time cows have access to the hay to 5-6 hours per day to reduce hay waste.

"This should only be done with hay that meets

the nutritional needs of the cow," Gadberry said. "Limit-time feeding with poor quality hay will cause under nourishment and production losses."

Other options include different feeding methods.

"Feeding hay in rings can cut feeding waste by half compared to unprotected access," Gadberry said. "Ring feeders with a metal skirt around the bottom reduce waste more than pipe feeders."

Other points:

Hay feeders can also be a less wasteful method than manger-type feeders. Unrolling hay can increase waste if more hay is offered than consumed in a short time.

Grinding or processing hay can increase consumption and reduce waste to less than 1 percent if fed in large feeders, such as recycling heavy equipment tires or large troughs.

Research has shown that processed hay fed on the ground was just as wasteful as other methods. "One producer is evaluating temporary electric fence to control trampling of unrolled hay," Gadberry said. "He unrolls a large round bale and then stretches an electrified poly wire down the middle of the length of the unrolled hay." Initial observations are that the cows line up along the hay line and do not trample or lay on the unrolled hay. Waste compared to unprotected unrolled hay hasn't yet been determined.

Jennings said that in cases where some rainfall has occurred and grass growth is returning, limit grazing while continuing to feed hay can help avoid overgrazing the recovering pasture.

"Limited grazed pasture also works well as a supplement for lower quality hay and can be a less expensive alternative to purchased feed supplements," he said. "Grazing two to three days per week along with feeding hay the remaining days or vice versa can help stretch limited forage." Δ