

# Hay Quality And Pricing

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Looking at today's market prices, affordability of inputs gets squeezed pretty tight. Producers from all areas are asking themselves, "What can I afford to pay and still make a profit or minimize my losses?" It is not easy to pass up opportunities when they come your way, yet if they don't reduce your costs or improve efficiencies; they should be passed up. Information presented in this article could be used in many scenarios, but I want to concentrate on hay as we are in the haying season.

When we think about hay, what comes to our attention? Price? Weight? Do we consider the quality of the hay and the nutrient value? Some producers do and others may just buy hay because they need a feed source and the hay was cheap. The term feed source means a great deal. Not too many producers will buy feed from the elevator without having the knowledge of what they are buying or having the say as to what they want in their feed. So why would hay be any different? Hay is a feed source. And just as we would price the feed at the dealer, we should be considering a price for the hay as well. No two producers' hay should be worth the same. One may be harvested later and have been rained on, or the other may be of a different variety causing different nutrient values. Either way, consideration of price should be calculated.

This past week's price list showed premium alfalfa at 160 dollars per ton, prairie hay at 100 dollars per ton and fescue and mixed grass at 70 dollars per ton. Which one is the better deal? From face value, and what I have given you, you might say that the mixed grass is the better deal, but we are missing too much information at this point. Weight is slightly a consideration. Since all prices were based per ton, you might say that it doesn't matter. However, when did

the hay get put up and was it put up wet. If so, you are buying water and the hay will not last very long due to molding. What is the nutrient value of the hay? I hadn't told you anything about that and frankly, I don't know either because it hasn't been tested. Your best source of information on hay quality and the price that should be paid for that hay is to have it tested. Crude protein will be the main consideration but not the only factor. Digestibility and other nutrient values should be thought through as well. Lush grass harvested at its peak would have far more nutrients than legume hay harvested a few days late. Thus, is it worth buying and feeding legumes when grasses are just as effective? This is just something that needs to be thought through before the purchase. Feeding hay doesn't go without a price and a big one too. A majority of the beef cattle operations that have kept records in the past showed net losses where they were feeding a great deal of hay – hay that might not have been the quality that they needed and then others that just fed too much.

Minimizing costs to the producer will mean surviving these low market times. Knowing what you are paying for and knowing what you are getting will aid in that survival. When making hay this summer, time the harvest so you can maximize the nutrients and not the quantity. When purchasing hay, have it tested or have the seller test it for you to ensure that you are getting the best source of nutrients possible for the dollar spent. If you are interested in selling or buying hay, the hay hotline is available. Also, there are hay listings on the agricultural page of MU Extension. For more information, you are always welcome to call your local extension office. Δ

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