

# Hay Supplies Up, But Not Back To Normal

LEXINGTON, KY.

Even though the majority of the state is in the midst of a drought, hay supplies are up from last year. However, some livestock producers will still need to find an additional hay source to get through the winter, said Tom Keene, hay marketing specialist with the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture.

“Overall, we are in decent to fair shape on cattle hay going into the winter,” he said. “Producers who use high quality hay to feed dairy cattle and horses will likely need to import additional quantities this year to have a sufficient supply.”

The wet spring rejuvenated pastures recovering from last year’s drought. This much-needed moisture helped the forages develop and allowed producers to get in early first and second cuttings.

“With hay being so hard to come by last year, most farmers that had any hay went ahead and made it early to get as much quality hay as they could,” Keene said. “This benefited cattle farmers.”

Since hay supplies on high quality alfalfa grass mix are low, Keene encouraged producers that need this type of hay to go ahead and line up their sources. Hay prices are up nationwide and producers should be prepared for sticker shock when looking to import hay from other states, he said.

For the second year in a row, livestock producers are dealing with the effects of a drought. Many already are feeding hay to their livestock or considering doing so.

“With some producers already feeding their cattle, it’s going to be long feeding period, he said. “Hay should be used judiciously to ensure supplies last through winter.”

Keene said that since many farmers applied little to no nitrogen to their fields this past year, they should have their hay tested for quality before feeding it to livestock.

Once the state gets some rain, producers may want to take measures to help their pastures recover from the most recent drought. Producers should consider applying nitrogen to their fields to help them recover and give them a boost going into winter. Fertilizing pastures to stimulate root growth, tillering and giving the fields another fertilizer application in the spring will also help improve 2009 pasture and hay yields. While this may seem excessive, especially with nitrogen costs being so high, Keene said some pastures may need the additional boost to produce quality forage, and he doesn’t see nitrogen prices dropping by the spring.

“The pastures have now been through two droughts in the past two years and need a little TLC,” he said. △