

Hay Thoughts

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In a previous newsletter I mentioned how the hay supply disappeared this winter. As winter ended I've had more farmers say their hay carryover was the smallest it's been in a few years. That means a lot of hay will be harvested this spring/summer. Just remember that fescue can make pretty good beef cattle hay if harvested early. Early, means by May 15 or 20.

Early cutting gives a lower acid detergent fiber and neutral detergent fiber level and higher protein amount. These features add up to greater total digestible nutrient values and better intake. Plus, the earlier harvest gives legumes a better chance to grow. The re-growth of the fescue makes an excellent pasture or hay for a second cutting.

If your objective is a high tonnage of high fiber, low protein, low quality hay then wait to start your fescue cutting when it's fully headed in late-May or early June. Be sure and store that poor hay where you can feed it to your cows that are in good flesh (6 body condition score) and won't calve until late February or March. Locate the early-cut, quality hay so it can be fed first to your fall-calvers and early January-February calvers.

Speaking of hay storage, as I drive up and down the roads I wonder, "why did they choose to locate a bale yard there?" There may be a good reason such as accessibility from the field where it was baled or to where it will be fed. However, make sure the area is well-drained and not

under trees along a fence row. The extension folks in Arkansas report on a trial in 2009 comparing hay storage losses at five different locations. The average storage time was 237 days. The average bale size was 4' x 5' with a dry weight of 674 pounds. It was good quality hay at 11.1% protein and 58.1% TDN.

The greatest dry matter loss was 25.4% for twine wrapped, uncovered bales stored on the ground. The greatest losses were along the twine valleys and on the bottom of the bales. The least dry matter loss was seen when the twine wrapped hay was stored in a barn. Here's a tip, if you do get high-quality, early-cut hay it should be put in the barn but watch moisture and temperature as barn fires can occur if you get in a hurry to put it in the barn too quickly. Check the internal temperatures and by 2 weeks, post-baling it should be safe to move to the barn.

If your bale yard isn't well-drained, consider setting bales on tires or pallets or a rock/gravel area. Twine-wrapped hay on the ground usually results in 20 to 40% dry matter loss. Net-wrapped, on the ground results in about one-half that loss. Good drainage, even on net-wrapped bales, reduces waste.

It's obvious there's a lot of variation in losses from the same method of storage. It all depends on the farmer and their management skills. Since hay is not cheap, whether you raise your own or buy it, do your best to store it properly.

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