

Make Plans Now For Winter Feeding



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Now is the time to start making plans for feeding the beef herd this winter.

According to the USDA Agricultural Statistics Service on May 1, hay stocks were down 54 percent from last year and the lowest since 1962. Beef producers have cut lots of acres for hay since May 1; however, yields were down. The forage plants appeared to head out early before the normal amount of forage was produced. This reduced harvest yields.

Another problem was the wet weather during the normal harvest time. This resulted in a significant amount of hay getting wet before it could be baled, reducing the hay quality. In addition, many producers waited until the weather was more favorable, so the forage plants were mature at harvest and had a lower quality.

The question now is, what should be done next? First, make an inventory of the hay that has been harvested. Next, make an estimate of what will be needed next winter. Be sure to take into consideration animals that will be removed from the herd due to culling. The difference in the two amounts is what should be of concern. How can the deficit be made up?

At the time this article being written in early

June, the prospect of limited rainfall during the summer seems a strong possibility. What are some ways to produce the remainder of the needed hay? First, look at dividing the existing pastures into smaller units. Start a rotational grazing program. If it turns extremely dry, it may be necessary to use all of the forage for grazing. If there is excess, then it can be harvested as hay. Next, consider planting a summer annual such as millet, Sudan sorghum or other grasses if there is enough available moisture.

Plan to stockpile some fescue if there is moisture available in August. Adding 60 units of nitrogen per acre and keeping the cattle off the pasture can delay the start of winter feeding. Don't forget to use any available crop residues, even if this requires some extra fencing to be constructed. Later in the fall, it may be desirable to plant some wheat, rye or ryegrass for winter grazing. The idea is to reduce as much as possible the amount of stored feed that must be utilized.

After going through a dry year in 2007 and not knowing what will happen the last half of 2008, it is critical that plans are made early for winter feeding. Most operations cannot afford to purchase expensive hay and grain again this year.

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