

Proper Hay Sampling Important For Accurate Analysis

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Value added, or the process of increasing the economic value and consumer appeal of a product has been utilized for many years in agriculture. Forage analysis is one example of “value” that has been “added” to hay, haylage, or other forages.

The value of forage analysis increases in tight economic conditions. Hay analysis plays a critical role in stretching hay supplies, balancing livestock rations, and is an important aspect of buying and selling hay.

Proper sampling of hay is extremely important to assure an accurate analysis. As the old saying goes, “an analysis is only as good as the sample provided to the laboratory”. If sampling procedures are carefully followed, sampling variation can be reduced to an acceptable level, and the potential forage quality successfully predicted. The following are industry accepted guidelines for hay sampling.

Identify a single “lot” of hay. A hay lot is identified as a single cutting, a single field and variety, and generally be less than 200 tons. Combinations of different lots of hay cannot be represented adequately by a forage sampling. Thus, different lots should be sampled separately.

Timely sampling. It is important to sample the hay either as close to feeding, or as close to point of sale as possible.

Use a hay sampling probe or coring device. Never send flakes or “grab” samples, as these do not adequately represent the hay lot. A list of

hay probes is available at the National Forage Testing Association web site: <http://www.foragetesting.org/>

Take a minimum of 20 cores for a composite sample to represent a hay lot regardless of bale size or shape. With small bales, take one core per bale; but with larger bales (one ton or greater), take two-three cores per bale in the center of the ends.

Sample butt ends of the hay bale, between the strings or wires, and not near the edge. The sides or the top of the bale should not be sampled, since these cores will only represent one flake from a single area of the field, and also misrepresent the leaf-to-stem ratio. With round bales, sample on the rounded portion towards the middle of the bale on an angle directly towards the center of the bale.

Sampling should be done so about a one-half pound sample is produced for the laboratory. The sampler should ensure that the entire one-half pound sample is ground by the laboratory.

Seal the composite 20-core sample in a plastic bag and protect from heat. Double bagging is beneficial. Deliver or mail to the laboratory as soon as possible. Do not allow samples to be exposed to excess sun.

Lastly, choose a National Forage Testing Association certified laboratory. A list is available at the above-mentioned web site.

Forage analysis doesn't cost, it pays. For help with sampling in Ogle County contact Bill Lindemier at (815) 732-2191. Δ