

When Feeding Hay To Cattle: Waste Not, Want Not

MT. VERNON, MO.

Waste not, want not, is an old adage that is definitely applicable to cattle producers in the hay shortage areas of Missouri.

According to Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension, cattle owners need to analyze their hay feeding systems more than ever this fall and winter.

“Just because you’ve fed big bales in conventional rings or unrolled them in the past doesn’t mean that’s the best this winter,” said Cole. “It’s amazing how much hay is rolled up in May or June that never gets into the animal’s rumen.”

RING STYLES

Research into feeding losses reveal that up to 35 percent of the hay offered cattle may be wasted. That translates into a loss of \$15 per bale on a 1000 pound bale valued at \$100 per ton.

“Hopefully your losses aren’t that costly, but a lot depends on your style

The most popular bale ring in southwest Missouri, according to Cole, is the basic ring without a skirt around the bottom. They are normally less expensive and the skirt reduces waste because it keeps hay from being pulled out and trampled.

Photo by Eldon Cole
livestock specialist with
MU Extension



of feeding, the quality of hay and the feeding devices you put the hay in,” said Cole.

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“The cone shaped feeder has come out as the most saving hay feeder in every trial I’ve seen results from. It is a little pricier, but if managed properly waste tends to be in the 5 percent range,” said Cole.

Compared to the earlier example that showed a \$15 per bale loss, the cone style feeders could

only have \$2.50 per bale in waste.

LIMITED ACCESS

“The quality of hay in most barns and bale yards likely is of lower quality this year than in an average year. This will increase the chance for bale waste unless the cattle are really hungry,” said Cole.

According to Cole, limiting the time cattle have access to the hay is another strategy that should be considered if the cows are in excellent body condition.

“If there’s adequate space around the bale feeders, allowing them about six hours access to the hay holds down intake to about 75 percent of the normally expected intake. You should test your hay to make sure it’s of decent quality, otherwise weight loss of the cows could

be excessive,” said Cole.

Sorting cows according to body condition, age and stage of production is key to conserving forage in times of shortage. There are a high percentage of farms in southwest Missouri with 30 to 50 cows that either calve year round or late winter and fall calvers run together.

Cole says sorting and feeding them separately helps stretch the hay supply, but it will take an extra pasture or lot.

“This winter will be a challenge for many as they try a variety of practices to stretch a limited and rather expensive hay supply. The upcoming months will find out who is tough in the cattle business,” said Cole. △



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