

HAY STORAGE

Hay harvest is or soon will be in full swing. You might get some of your hay made without rain damage but will it stay that way?

We worry alot about rain damage before we get hay put up, don't we? Isn't it kind of funny, then, that we store that hay outside with little protection? The fact is that most rain damage on our hay occurs after the hay has been put up!

Research in northeast Nebraska showed that hay stored outside lost over ten percent of its total weight between summer haying and winter feeding. And it gets worse with hay carried over a second year. One-fourth of the hay weight can be lost after a year and a half of outside storage.

Maybe worse still, the protein and TDN concentration in the hay that remains also is much lower. Over 40 percent of the protein and over one-third of the TDN that was originally in the hay when it was put up was no longer available for livestock when that hay was fed a year and a half later.

What does this mean? Well, it means that protecting your hay, especially your better quality hay, from weather damage during storage will save you feed and money. Tarps, plastic, and even sheds will pay for themselves in just a few years by saving hay and nutrients.

If uncovered storage is your only option, place bales and stacks on an elevated site with good drainage so moisture doesn't soak up from the bottom. Don't stack round bales or line them up with the twine sides touching – rain will collect where they touch and soak into the bale. Also, allow space for air to circulate and dry hay after rain.

Pencil it out for yourself. Once you see how much tonnage and how many pounds of protein and TDN you lose each year, I think you'll be looking for ways to cut your storage losses as well.

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