

HAYING WET MEADOWS THAT ARE TOO WET

The extra rain received by central and western regions this year has been mostly welcome. But it has raised havoc with making hay, especially on wet meadows.

Wet meadows are a great resource. Their natural subirrigation enables them to reliably grow many of the plants cut for winter hay for many ranches.

This year, however, many of these meadows have had too much of a good thing – rain. Not only have frequent rain showers made it difficult to put up the hay, many meadows are so wet it's been impossible to even get in to cut the hay.

So what do you do? I suppose you can continue to wait until the ground dries and firms up enough to drive haying equipment over it. But the quality of this late cut hay isn't going to be very good and the cost of putting it up will be high. And for many of you, much of your summer hay crew will soon go back to school.

Maybe a better idea would be to winter graze the meadows instead of cutting hay. You might need to build some temporary fence and figure out how cattle will be watered, but there are several advantages to this approach. First, it saves you the time and expense of cutting and feeding hay. Also, it reduces the risk of damaging the meadow with heavy equipment running over it when it's too soft. Cattle won't cause damage if you graze only when the ground is firm or frozen. And finally, research on both meadows and uplands has shown that dry cows do well when winter grazing, often needing just a little protein supplement to assure good fiber digestion and healthy calves.

With all these advantages, I wouldn't be surprised if some of you ranchers who try it decide to do at least some of it on a regular basis.

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