

## HARVESTING SMALL GRAIN CEREALS FOR HAY OR SILAGE

Small grain cereals can be made into quite useful silages or hay. Now, I'm not going to try and mislead you into thinking they are just as good as corn silage or alfalfa hay. However, they can provide much useful feed when harvested and fed correctly.

Tonnage and forage quality are affected most by stage of plant maturity at harvest. Plants that contain ten to twelve percent crude protein when in the boot stage may only have seven or eight percent protein when they reach soft dough.

In order to time harvest for the best use in your own operation, first determine what livestock will be fed this forage. Calves, stockers, and replacement heifers need a fairly high quality forage to gain weight as rapidly as desired, so hay and silage needs to be harvested while plants are in the boot or early heading stage. Dry cows, though, won't need such high quality so harvest can be delayed until dough stage to achieve higher yields and still have acceptable protein levels.

Think twice, though, about making hay from rye, triticale, or wheat that has formed seed heads. These seed heads produce rough awns that can irritate and injure the eyes and mouth parts of livestock. To avoid problems from awns, either cut hay before seed heads emerge or make silage from the more mature plants to soften and break these awns.

I also suggest testing the hay or silage for nitrates as well as for protein and energy before beginning to feed it. This will help you feed more safely and efficiently.

Last fall's cereal planting is about ready to harvest. Time it right to get the best feed for your livestock.

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