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PLAN THE TIMING OF GRASS HAY HARVEST

Native meadows will soon start growing rapidly and bromegrass is about to head out. Here are some tips to make your grass hay suitable for your animals.

When do you cut your grass hay? Do you wait until all crops are planted? Maybe you plan to cut during first or second irrigation of corn. Or like some folks, maybe you cut grass hay just when you get around to it.

Instead, how about cutting your grass hay so the grass nutrient content matches with the nutritional needs of your livestock? Now that's a different way to look at it, isn't it? But doesn't it make sense to harvest hay that will meet the specific needs of your livestock and minimize your supplement costs?

We all know that protein and energy concentration declines in grass hay as plants become stemmy and get more mature. As this happens, the types of livestock that can be fed that hay with little or no supplements become more limited.

For example, grass hay cut at early head often can support more than one pound of daily gain for pregnant yearling heifers all by itself. But if the same grass gets mature it won't even maintain weight of a mature cow without some protein supplements.

So, what should you do? First off, plan what type of livestock will receive the grass hay from each field. Young livestock need high nutrient concentrations so cut that hay before or just when heads begin to emerge. If the hay will go to mature, dry cows instead, let the grass produce a bit more growth and cut it after it is well headed out, but before seeds develop.

Matching your hay harvest with your plan of use can pay handsome dividends in lower costs and less supplementing.

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