

PUT CARRYOVER HAY TO GOOD USE

The open winter left many of you with more hay left over than expected. Save some of that hay in case of drought, but any extra hay might provide extra value if it is used strategically.

Get extra value from carryover hay by using that hay in ways that will be valuable especially to you. Usually that means feeding hay instead of something else that would be more expensive. Another option, though, is to feed hay so you can make other resources more profitable.

For example, replace old, thinning alfalfa fields with new seedings this spring. Then use carryover hay to substitute for lost yield during this seeding year. Future hay yields from new fields should be more abundant and reliable.

Or how about adding legumes to cool-season grass pastures or hay meadows. We usually lose some forage production during the year of legume establishment as you control competition from the existing sod, but your carryover hay can be fed instead as needed. Better grazing and future meadow production should be the result.

Another possibility that would be especially useful this year is to feed hay a little longer this spring before turning cows out to pasture. Or maybe feed this hay mid-summer to provide extra rest and recovery for your pastures, increasing their productivity. Grass weakened by heavy grazing the past couple of years then will get extra time to recover before experiencing this year's stress of grazing.

You also could use less fertilizer on pastures or haylands and make up for the reduced production with your carryover hay. Or chop less silage and use hay next winter instead.

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