

## Salvaging Soybeans as Hay and Silage

Will your dryland soybeans make beans in this drought? If you don't think so, maybe you can salvage them as hay or silage. Soybean hay and silage can have feeding values very similar to alfalfa. At least when it's made right. But don't get in a hurry; August rains before beans start dropping leaves still might make a crop. Harvest soybean forage when leaves start to turn yellow, just before they drop off. It's especially important to harvest before a freeze to prevent rapid leaf loss.

Soybean hay is challenging to make. The leaves dry quickly and then become crumbly if raked. The stems are quite woody and dry slowly. Be sure to condition or crimp the hay to hasten stem dry down. Also, avoid raking if at all possible. Soybean leaves crumble easy when dry, which will cause some yield loss and much lower feed value. If you must rake to merge windrows together for baling, do it within one day of cutting. Do not rake just to hasten drying or leaf loss will be severe.

Making good soy silage is less risky, if you have silage equipment and do it right. I prefer mixing chopped soybeans with corn or sorghum as they are being ensiled, but that's not always possible. For straight soy silage, first get a good, clean chop. Uniformly add a silage inoculant designed for legumes like alfalfa. In addition, add about one bushel of cracked corn or fifty pounds of molasses to each ton of wet silage to aid fermentation. And pack soy silage especially well.

Obviously, you would rather harvest a good bean crop than make hay or silage out of your soybeans. But when drought and heat prevent a good bean crop, it's nice to know that they can be salvaged as hay or silage.

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