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STORAGE METHODS TO REDUCE HAY LOSSES

Hay stored outside will be damaged by rain, snow, wind, and ice this fall and winter. The average round bale loses about one fourth of its original nutrients during storage, but these losses can be reduced to less than 10 percent or so. Now, I'm sure you are better than average. Still, let's look at ways to reduce spoilage by storing that extra valuable hay more carefully this year.

For instance, do you usually line up bales for easy access so the twine sides touch each other? Or do you stack your bales? If so, extra spoilage will occur where these bales touch because rain, snow, and ice will gather in spots where bales touch instead of running off. Round bales butted end-to-end, cigar-like, usually have less spoilage.

Does snow drift around your bales? Bales placed in east-west rows often have drifts on the south side. Hay next to fence lines or trees can get extra snow. As snow melts it soaks into bales or makes the ground muddy. Plus, the north side never gets any sun so it's slow to dry. This year, line your bales up north-and-south for fewer drifts and faster drying as sunlight and prevailing winds hit both sides of the row.

Most important is the bottom of your bales. Always put bales on higher, well-drained ground so water drains away from them. Keep them out of terrace bottoms or other low spots. If necessary, use crushed rock, railroad ties, or even pallets to elevate bales to keep the bottoms dry. This also will reduce problems getting to your hay or getting it moved due to snow drifts or mud.

Just a little pre-planning can save lots of hay and frustrations.

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