Feeding Value of CRP Hay

CRP has been released for haying and grazing in many areas because of the drought. What can you expect from this hay as a feed for your animals?

How good of a feed is CRP hay? Well, to be perfectly honest, I really don't know. The biggest complicating factor is how much old residue from previous years is in the hay. This residue contains only 3 or 4 percent protein and maybe 40 percent TDN. So, the more residue you have, the lower your hay's nutrient level is going to be. And animals aren't going to be too anxious to eat it either.

My best guess is that most brome or fescue CRP hay will be just a little worse than regular brome and fescue hay because most of these fields had relatively low amounts of residue. Brome and fescue harvested as hay in July or August, though, is quite mature, so protein probably will be less than 9 percent and TDN no more than 55 percent.

Warm-season grass hay, like switchgrass or native mixtures, likely will suffer more from old residue. Protein might be only 5 percent and TDN about 50 percent. Of course, if residue was burned off of these warm-season grass CRP fields this spring, the hay quality will be better, probably around 7 to 8 percent protein and 50 to 55 percent TDN. And most important of all, your animals will eat it much better.

For your fields, though, these estimates could be way off. So this year, more than ever, get a forage test of hay quality to learn exactly what you have to feed. Then you can design proper feeding and supplement programs to use this hay effectively.

CRP hay can be a very useful feed. But since it's difficult to predict its feeding value, forage test to know what you've got.

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