

Forage Test for Hay Quality

How much did this summer's weather affect the feed value of your hay and silage? Did rain damage or drought affect the protein level? Is all hay or silage alike? Now that's a silly question, isn't it. Of course not. But - how much different are all your various forages?

That's hard to tell just by looking, smelling, and touching the hay and silage. It's tricky when the variation in your forage quality is due to factors like drought or rain damage, mold or overheating, or other weather conditions. Plus, this year many of you harvested forages you don't normally feed. Forages like drought damaged corn silage, hail damaged soybeans, road ditch hay, CRP hay, or even weedy alfalfa.

So - how do you allocate and feed these different forages to your livestock to minimize costs and purchased supplements while still maintaining top production? You start with information. This year, maybe more than ever, forage testing is important. It is the only way you can find out for sure what the feed value is of your hay and silage. Collect a sample of each and every different type of forage you have. Test it for protein content, check its TDN, test nitrates.

Then plan. Plan to use lower quality forage for cattle with low nutrient demands, like dry mature cows. Plan to feed high quality forage to cattle needing more nutrients, like first calf heifers and cows nursing calves. And then calculate - calculate how much supplement you need for each feeding situation. The answer may surprise you, but with forage testing, you'll know.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

