

HAY MOISTURE TESTERS

Have you ever baled hay you thought was dry, only to have it heat and mold and spoil in storage? Maybe moisture meters and probes can help you avoid this problem.

Putting up hay at the right moisture content will help retain leaves and prevent spoilage. However, it's difficult to estimate moisture content of hay by touch alone. So some folks use electronic probes to measure moisture content in their hay.

Unfortunately, moisture probes and meters often are unreliable. So many factors affect their accuracy, things like the density of the hay, or whether the moisture is inside the stem or just on the surface of the stem. Operator skill and experience also are important.

But, moisture probes can give you some guidance. So, if you want to try them, go ahead. But use precautions and know the limitations.

For instance, don't rely on readings taken from the windrow. Contact with the probe is too variable. Instead, bale one or two bales first and then probe these bales. Also, be skeptical of probe readings on hay that is becoming tough due to rising humidity. The surface moisture that collects under these conditions causes much larger reactions with the probe than does the internal stem moisture.

Probably the best way to use a hay probe is to begin by probing selected bales, recording you probe's readings, recording weather and hay conditions, and then collecting actual samples from the bales and drying them in an oven to compare true measurements to the probe readings. Before long, you should be able to identify conditions that permit accurate or cause inaccurate readings.

Then, and only then, can a moisture probe help solve more problems than it might cause.

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