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**Have You Heard?**

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### **SAVE ON HAY and FINE TUNE YOUR PASTURES**

Bruce Anderson, UNL forage specialist, recently sent a reminder about how much expense and long hours go into harvesting and storing hay for winter feeding. So he asks, why waste it? Hay feeding waste can be reduced through some simple management steps.

Cattle can waste as much as 45 percent of their hay when it is fed without restrictions. How can you reduce these losses to minimize costs and maintain an adequate hay supply? Your first step should be to limit how much hay is available. Research shows that it takes 25% more hay to feed cattle a four-day supply compared to feeding them every day. Daily feeding reduces the amount of hay refused, trampled, fouled, over-consumed, or used for bedding.

A second step is to restrict access to the hay by using hay racks, bale rings, electric fences, feed bunks, or anything else that will keep animals off the hay. It's especially important to limit the amount of hay accessible to trampling. So use racks or bale rings with solid barriers at the bottom to prevent livestock from pulling hay loose and then dragging it out to be stepped on.

If you feed hay on the ground, either as loose hay, unrolled round bales, or as ground hay, it is especially important to follow these guidelines. Limit the hay fed to an amount animals will clean up in a single meal. Anything left over will be stepped on, fouled, or used for bedding instead of as feed. If possible, use an electric wire or other barrier to restrict access to only one side of the feed on the ground. However, be sure to distribute the hay enough so all cows have access to it at the same time. With a little foresight and careful management, you can stretch your hay further.

### **PASTURE LEASES**

Often I will get asked about the UNL lease survey information about cropland and pasture rent information. It's not unusual when talking to the client, the pasture lease is verbal and not in writing. Worse, there is often no communication about potential drought conditions. Drought can play havoc on pasture leases. All too often, pasture leases fail to include an appropriate plan to adjust to this problem.

Without a plan, both the landowner and the tenant are at risk. Landowners risk having the pasture become overgrazed, resulting in future weed problems, reduced long-term production, and lowered value. The tenant risks poor performance or health of the livestock due to less forage and lower quality feed. This can lead to higher supplemental feed costs or being forced to sell the cattle.

Make sure in the lease who decides when drought has lowered pasture production low enough to remove the cattle. On the tenants side there should be an adjustment in the rental rate to compensate for conditions.

Now is a good time to discuss these issues as landlord and tenant. Be sure to list the length of the grazing period in the lease along with beginning and ending dates. Also make sure that stocking rates are specified in the lease. Adjust these stocking levels for bigger cow sizes if necessary. Usually, it is best to design the lease so both landowner and tenant share in the opportunity and risk associated with drought by adding an appropriate escape clause due to drought. Indicate how a drought adjustment will be made and how that will affect rent payments. Leases in writing help to avoid any misunderstandings later.

Drought can cause a lot of headaches but with advance planning, having to make a sudden adjustment in your lease will not be one of them.

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