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## SECRETS FOR DRYING SORGHUMS AND MILLETS

Most summer annual forage grasses have large, coarse stems that dry slowly when cut for hay. It is not unusual for windrows to lay in the field for two weeks and still not be dry enough to bale safely. So it's important to use every method known to get them dry.

Begin by cutting when plants are only about 3 feet tall to reduce volume and have smaller stems. Now may be too late for that advice this year, however. Also, be sure to crimp the hay as it is being cut to crack open stems and allow moisture to escape more easily.

I like to cut high, leaving 8 to 10 inches of stubble to hold hay off the ground for faster drying and to encourage more rapid regrowth. But, some growers prefer to cut as short as possible to slow down regrowth, hoping to get the hay dry before regrowth grows into it.

When you first cut the hay, spread it out in as wide a swath as possible. This exposes more of it to sunlight energy that is critical for drying. After the exposed top surface is mostly dry start raking to turn and expose wetter portions to sunlight and wind. Effective raking probably is more skill and art than it is science, but do your best to just flip the windrow over and keep it loose and fluffy. And lay newly raked hay onto dry ground if at all possible. It usually takes several rakings to fully dry these annual grasses.

It's really hard to tell when the stems are dry enough to bale so it often helps to use a propionic acid-based preservative when baling to reduce the risk of mold and heat damage to the hay.

Annual grasses are difficult to dry. By using these steps, and with a little luck with weather, it can be done.

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