

STORING HAY OUTSIDE

Wouldn't it be nice to put all your hay under a roof? Since most of us don't have that luxury, outdoor storage techniques that minimize storage losses are needed.

Over one-fourth of your hay's nutrients can be lost due to weathering between now and feeding next winter. To minimize these losses, begin by making dense, evenly formed bales or stacks. They will shed water better and sag less than a soft core or less dense package. Use net wrap or plastic twine spaced no more than four inches apart on round bales to maintain bale shape and provide a smooth surface that encourages water runoff.

Store hay on an elevated, well-drained site so it won't soak up moisture from wet soils or standing water. Especially avoid terrace valleys. Also avoid fences or tree lines that cause snow to drift onto hay or that prevent wind and sunshine from drying off wet bales.

Often our biggest mistake is placing bales so water that runs off of one bale ends up soaking into an adjacent bale. Never stack round bales during the rainy season unless they are covered or unless they will be fed very soon. And avoid placing bales in a row with the twine or wrapped ends touching one another.

Instead, it is best to place round bales or stacks so there is about one foot of air space on all sides for good ventilation. Round bales also store well when the flat ends are butted end-to-end in a cigar-like shape. Orient these rows north and south so prevailing winds will not cause snow drifts and so both sides of the row can receive sunlight for drying.

Follow these guidelines and you will lower your storage losses, increase feed quality, and improve animal performance.

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

