

This Will Be a Good Year to Test Hay

This has been a difficult spring for getting fescue and winter annuals harvested for hay. The warm weather in April resulted in plants that matured early, and May rains delayed the harvest date for many producers. As these plants continue to mature, their digestibility will be reduced.

In addition, research has shown that cured hay that is rained on before baling will also be lower in quality. This is particularly true for cool season forages. Researchers at the University of Arkansas noted a 6% unit increase in fiber content of cool-season grasses when a 3- inch artificial rain was applied to cured hay prior to baling.

Typically, 70 percent of the hays in Arkansas do not meet the energy requirements for lactating beef cows, and this winter, if the hay can't support the cows' nutritional requirements through late gestation and early lactation, reproductive performance and calf weaning weights can be affected. Therefore this year—even for those who have tested hay in the past—is a good year to send hay samples off for a nutrient analysis to determine whether hay alone will meet the requirements of the herd this fall.

If hay is being stored in a barn, go ahead and sample the hay as it is being put into storage. If storing in an uncovered lot, wait until fall before sampling. Core samples will better represent the quality of bales than grab samples, and most county Extension offices have forage probes available. For more information on collecting and sending hay samples for nutrient analysis, contact your local county Extension office.