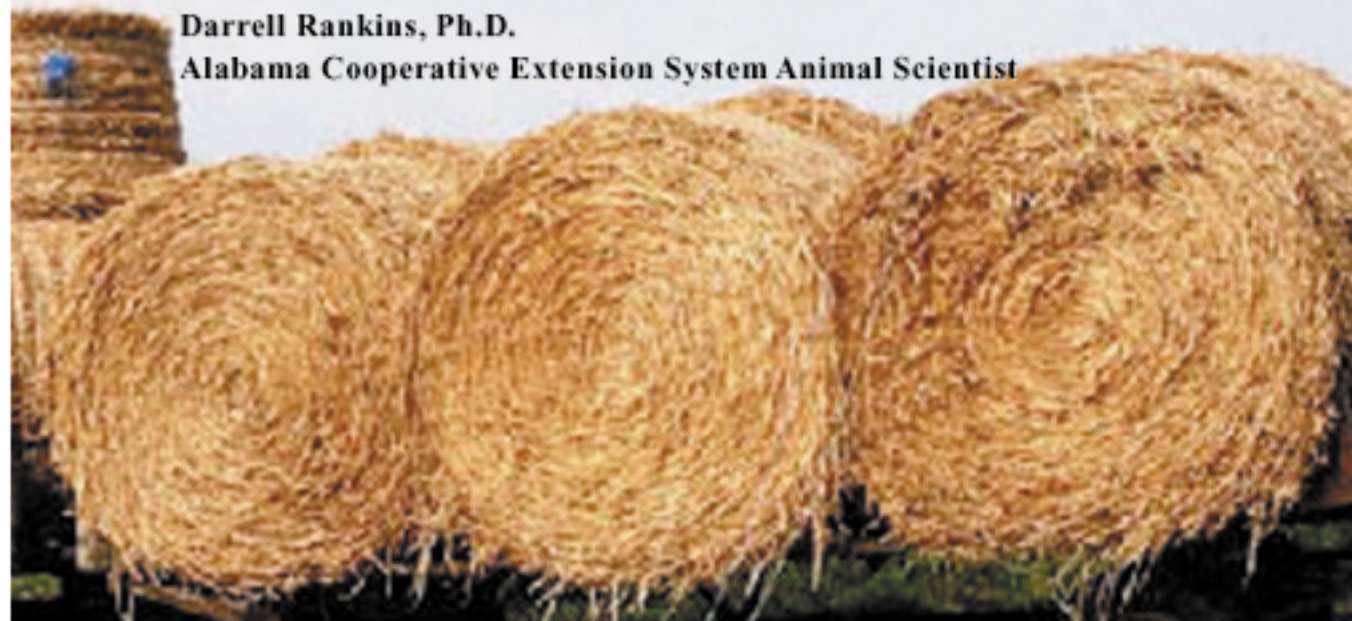


Preparing for Hay Season

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Each and every person who raises beef cattle most likely has some experience in putting up hay. As we begin to prepare for the 2009 hay-making season it would be advantageous to review some high points with regard to making good quality hay. The quality of your hay will have large implications on whether or not your cows will need supplemental feed to complement the hay this winter.

Fertility. If you have observed cows being offered fertilized hay versus un-fertilized hay you will notice that most of the time they will choose the fertilized hay over the un-fertilized. Nitrogen fertilizer will have a direct effect on the crude protein content of the hay. For example, a study from Florida showed that bermudagrass fertilized with 35, 70, 105 and 140 pounds of nitrogen per acre yielded hay that contained 10.9, 13.8, 15.8 and 18.1 percent crude protein, respectively. However, it is important to remember that a dry brood cow will only need about 7 to 9% crude protein in the hay that she is fed and

a lactating cow needs 10 to 12% crude protein in her diet. These protein concentrations can generally be achieved with less than 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre.

Forage Maturity. This is the most important factor that YOU can control with respect to hay quality. Forage maturity can have enormous impacts on hay quality. Work from Georgia showed this impact quite clearly. The accompanying table shows the energy content (dry matter digestibility) of bermudagrass hay with respect to cutting interval.

As with protein it is important to assess these data relative to the cow's requirements for energy. A cow in late pregnancy will need 54 to 56% TDN in her diet while a cow nursing a baby calf will need 60 to 64% TDN depending on her milking abilities. Thus it becomes obvious that cutting bermudagrass hay on an eight-week interval would yield hay that would be marginal for cows in late pregnancy and inadequate for lactating cows. This hay would require appreciable quantities of supplemental

feed when fed to lactating cows. However, the same bermudagrass harvested on four-week intervals could potentially yield hay that would meet cow requirements no matter what their stage of production. Forage maturity (i.e., cutting interval) is extremely important for producing high-quality hay.

Rain. Many demonstrations have shown that up to about an inch of rain on hay that was cut that same day has minimal effects on nutrient content. Obviously the hay will lose its green color and not be as pretty. An inch of rain on the hay the day that it is ready to bale will have a measurable impact on nutrient content. The bottom line is that we can control cutting interval and have no control over the weather during the hay-making season. Thus if the forage crop is ready to cut, putting it off because of a 30% chance of afternoon showers may decrease the quality more than the rain would. Low-quality hay will certainly have implications for feeding your cows next winter. May your mower blades be sharp and your baler be greased!

| Cutting Interval (weeks) | Approximate TDN (%) |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 3 | 65 |
| 4 | 62 |
| 5 | 59 |
| 6 | 58 |
| 8 | 54 |
| 12 | 51 |

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