



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

Know what you're feeding

Last summer was a doozy in the Midwest for putting up hay. While a few folks found windows of good hay-making weather, that was not typical. Frequent and bountiful rains made it hard to put hay up dry. I'll bet my family wasn't the only one to purchase equipment to put hay up wet. The rains also delayed planting, changing the varieties planted if not the crop planted.

A lot of unknowns

While the rainy spring and early summer made it hard to get crops planted, grass grew just fine early in the year. There was a lot of it early, just few consecutive days to get it cut, cured, packaged and stored without a good washing. As folks waited for a window, that grass kept maturing, and we know what that does to forage quality.

As a result, we're going into winter feeding months with a menagerie of feedstuffs, varying more in type and quality than that to which we are accustomed.

To top it off, weather forecasters are looking at *El Niño* and predicting this winter could be one of the coldest and snowiest since 1950. Cattle exposed to dry, cold weather will increase their feed consumption 30%, according to researchers at the University of Tennessee. Wet hides and mud compound nutrient needs.

A cow can starve to death with all the hay in the world in front of her if it's low enough in quality that she can't physically put enough in her belly to get the energy she needs for daily maintenance. She'll shut off other production functions — such as lactation and cycling — first.

Hay put up wet can heat and heat can damage protein (let alone burn the barn down). Wet hay can mold, causing health concerns. Maturity affects energy, mineral and protein content. From starting with new and different forages to packaging in new and different ways to how long it's stored, each variable can affect the nutrient content of the forage we are feeding.



Please, test your forage

Bottom line, for the well-being of your herd and the profitability of your ranch, please, please, please test your forage for quality and harmful molds before you feed this winter. Preventing one open cow next spring can compensate for a considerable number of forage tests, which of course varies but can be done for about \$15 per sample.

Read Joann Pipkin's story on page 106. Talk to your veterinarian. Call your local extension agent. Visit with your feed dealer. Ask them about the trends in forage quality in your area and where to go for forage testing. Use them to build a nutrition program that will make the most of your harvested and stockpiled feeds, optimize the reproduction of your herd and maximize its health.

Please, at least test what you think is your best, your worst and about average. If the variance doesn't convince you to test more lots, I'll be amazed.

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Angus Journal

3201 Frederick Ave., Saint Joseph, MO 64506; 1-800-821-5478; fax: 816-233-6575; office hours: (M-F) 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (Central)
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