



Beef Tips

and Cow Chips

Surry County Center

May - July 2020

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Don't Mow Too Close!

"Hey, why do my hayfields look bad", "why is my stand thinning", and "why do I have more weeds than I used to" are questions that I receive calls about all of the time. All of these are great questions and can have very different answers or causes. However, in a lot of the cases, something most people never think about may be the problem. Disc mowers have allowed forages to be cut close to the ground, WAY too close. Some do this to maximize yield; however, this approach can have severe consequences to forage stand life and forage quality.

With a higher cutting height, more low-quality stem is left in the field, regrowth is generally quicker and stand health and long-term productivity is higher. In addition, the light allowed to reach the ground is less and therefore the amount of weed species that germinate is less. Low cutting heights for extended periods of time can actually lead to stand loss and the need to reseed.

When we think about how a plant grows, we all know it's by photosynthesis through the leaves. It stands to reason that if we remove more leaves the amount of photosynthesis that can occur is less. The same is true if we overgraze pastures. We all know that overgrazing leads to increased weed pressure and fewer desirable plants. This is definitely not what we want in hayfields either.

So, what can we do? First look at what you're mowing. Cool season grasses such as Fescue or Orchardgrass are very different in how they regrow as opposed to something like Alfalfa. In Alfalfa, mowing low is not as critical, it regenerates from buds near the soil surface. Next, evaluate

your mower and contact your dealer to see if skids can be adjusted to mow higher or see if skid extension can be purchased. This will allow for you to leave more leaf area in the field and in the long run produce more and higher quality forage. Especially in grass stands. Another plus for mowing higher is reduced aflatoxin levels in Fescue. The endophyte, that is such a problem in fescue, is concentrated in the lower base of the plant and in the seedhead. Once again, it's like overgrazing a pasture, grazing too low increases the negative effect of the endophyte on the animal.

The bottom line here is this. Mowing close may increase the yield of a single harvest, but in the long run it can lead to lower yields, higher weed pressure and possibly even decreased animal performance.



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Is a Hay Barn Worth the Cost?

Hay or some other harvested forage is the biggest cost on most cattle farms. This is true no matter the type of cattle operation you're involved with. Given that fact, the winter we just experienced and current calf prices, let's take a hard look at our business model.

Hay stored outside leads to loss, that's a given. The question is, how much loss? Some studies put it as high as 60%, most sources will say somewhere in the 30-40% range if it's stored uncovered outside. This of course can be altered by several factors. The density of the bale is foremost, net wrap or twine, shaded ground, is it off the ground, is it off the ground, is it covered by at least a tarp, all these play a part in the loss equation. Think of the economic impact of that! All that labor, equipment, fertilizer, weed control just GONE!

Here's a good rule of thumb based on averages. In a 4 foot bale the outer 4 inches amounts to about a third of the bale, in a 5 foot bale the outer 5 inches equates to about a third, in a 6 foot bale, the outer 6 inches is about a third.

To put it in perspective, the tables below show typical percentage losses for various storage methods and an economic value of hay lost by percentage. On most farms, production costs are going to be in the \$100—\$125/ton cost of production, so look at what you may be losing in storage loss.

Table 1		
Ranges in Storage Losses for Various Hay Storage Methods		
	% of Dry Weight	
Storage Methods	Twine	Net Wrap
Pole Barn	2-5%	2-5%
Tarp	5-10%	5-8%
Outside, Well Drained	20-40%	15-40%
Outside, Shady	30-60%	30-45%

Table 2				
Value of Hay Lost				
	Value of Hay (\$ per dry ton)			
% Loss	\$75	\$100	\$125	\$150
10	\$8	\$10	\$13	\$15
20	\$15	\$20	\$25	\$30
30	\$23	\$30	\$38	\$45
40	\$30	\$40	\$50	\$60
50	\$38	\$50	\$63	\$75
60	\$45	\$60	\$75	\$90

In addition, I saw several cases this past winter where animals had hay in the feeder but were still in poor body condition. In many cases, the hay in those situations had been stored outside so the nutritional levels were not at a point to meet an animal's nutritional needs.

So back to the question at hand, is a hay barn worth the cost? It's often been said that if you're storing your hay outside, you're paying for a barn whether you want to or not. This might even apply to using a tarp on your hay stored outside.

If you decide to explore building a barn, here are a couple of items to consider.

- **Pick the Right Site:** Picking a site that's low will end up costing you, either by water running in or trying to take measures to keep water out or draining it away. Gutters and ditches will help to remove additional water away from the area. Also, ensure that you have a well-drained area to load and unload the hay to keep vehicles and equipment from creating mud and ruts. Place your barn near a road with an adequate amount of space for loading and unloading hay. If the barn is located on the same farm as the livestock, choose a spot that is centralized to reduce hauling and labor costs.
- **Ventilation:** Air movement though a barn is critical to maintaining quality in hay. If the barn doesn't have adequate airflow hay can actually sweat and lead to reduced quality. If you're building new, leave a space at the eave of the barn to allow air through. Also, turn the barn perpendicular to prevailing wind flow so air will move through even when air movement is low.

In the end, whatever storage method you choose will lead to some loss. Storing and protecting the quality of the hay you produce will result in higher performance of your animals and less hay requirements per animal.

MANAGING ASIAN LONGHORNED TICKS IN BEEF HERDS

Last year Surry County made the popular press in a negative way when an announcement was made that 5 young bulls were killed by a new pest, the Asian Longhorned Tick. Well, it's time to start getting a handle on how to manage for this pest this year. With the mild winter, I expect tick pressure to be high and it makes sense for us to plan for this tick in our herds.

The first step to managing for this tick is identifying if you have them. Many producers attended a meeting where they heard from Dr. Wes Watson, an Entomology Specialist from NCSU about the ticks and were given sample bottles to collect ticks in to send to Dr. Watson for identification. If you weren't at the meeting and would like more information about collections, please give me a call at our office (336-401-8025).



The best thing that producers can do to check for this tick is to really look at your cattle. These ticks tend to migrate to the ears, tail head and brisket of the animal. Pay particular attention to these areas when looking for ticks. If you find any ticks and would like to have them identified, let me know and we will develop a plan to get that done.

Having an effective parasite control plan in place is always advised. This plan should include reasonable and manageable steps to help manage all parasites in a herd. If you would like help in developing a parasite control plan for your farm, Extension can help or a veterinarian can always be consulted. Fortunately, the pyrethroid class of chemicals are known to control a wide variety of tick and other ectoparasite species on animals; and can be applied

to backrubbers to help in controlling many external parasites of cattle. As a reminder, backrubbers must be charged regularly to ensure effectiveness. So, in this case, taking a step back in time may help with all classes of parasite control.

It's Not Too Early For Weed Control!

A weed is defined as any plant growing where you don't want it. Everyone recognizes the need for weed control. Not only does it make for better quality pasture or hay, but it also eliminates grass having to compete with the weeds. Without weeds, grass is able to fully utilize available moisture and nutrients to reach maximum yield potential. Here are some things to keep in mind when trying to control weeds.

No matter how you plan to control weeds, the control measures should be scheduled to coincide with optimum weed susceptibility. In most pasture and hay weed herbicides, action occurs through translocation. Applying at the right time is very important. As a rule, early is better! Even now we may be behind on some weeds, such as buttercup, so as the title says, it's not too early for weed control.

There are many products on the market that will do a fine job of controlling broadleaf weeds. The most well-known product is probably 2,4-D. It gives excellent control of bitter sneezeweed, plantains, buttercup, and ragweed but relatively poor control of horsetail and most woody weeds. One note here on 2,4-D: when applied at lower rates, it will not

harm white clover. Weedmaster provides excellent control of broadleaf weeds and is the preferred product in hay operations. Try to choose a product that will control as many of the weeds that you have as possible.

This will keep costs down and avoid multiple trips through the field. If more than one product must be used, try to choose products that can be mixed in the same tank and applied in one pass. Some products, like Weedmaster, can be mixed with liquid fertilizer as the carrier. Using this method, a producer could perform two functions with one pass.



Spiny Amaranth

Also, note the surrounding crops. Many of these herbicides are lethal to tobacco, grapes or soybeans.

Producers should choose a product that won't harm surrounding crops if exposed to drift. If this is not possible, try to choose a formulation that is less prone to volatilization. The more volatile a product is, the more likely you will experience product drift. Drift will also vary with boom height, nozzle type, pressure, and wind.

Producers should know and adhere to any grazing or haying restrictions. Some products have restrictions on grazing and haying while others have restrictions just on haying. These restrictions can be anywhere from seven days to one year, so make sure you know what you are dealing with. An interesting note here is that most products that have no grazing restrictions for beef cattle will have grazing restrictions for dairy cattle. Most will also have a withdrawal period before slaughter.



Horsetail



Hemp Dogbane

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