

June 19, 2026

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Planned Hay Purchase

Sitting in a grazing management workshop yesterday, participants were again encouraged to consider the stored forage part of the operation and work to extend the grazing season. I don't disagree with any of those sentiments and completely agree that the ruminant can harvest, process, and distribute the manure from forage better than any diesel-powered equipment, but the reality for most operations is that some amount of stored forage is needed.

A relatively dry fall, winter and early spring, following heavy fall armyworm damage in places last year, has created the situation where most folks are likely finding fewer bales of hay in the field as they get done baling. Checking current hay inventories, prices, and forage quality can mitigate potential feeding challenges during the colder months.

Feed inputs often make up the largest portion of a livestock producer's costs. Be aware of a few principles in purchasing hay to make the most out of this investment. Determine whether you are paying on a per ton or per bale basis. The [Kansas Direct Hay Report](#) most often reports on a per ton basis but know how hay is priced before you buy. Knowing the hay quality will help in spending feed dollars more effectively. Buy bales that are tightly rolled, dense, and have square shoulders that don't sag. Bales should be free of mold, weed seeds and dangerous levels of nitrates. Net wrap can be loved or hated but does help bales shed water.

The class of animals and their nutritional/body condition help to determine consumption demand and the quality of hay needed. If possible, buy forage that will best match those requirements. Don't forget though that hay can be supplemented with additional protein and energy sources to meet requirements if higher quality hay is hard to source or lower quality hay can be reasonably purchased.

Use a lab analysis to determine forage quality. Core sample 15-20 bales from each lot and send the samples to a lab for testing. These tests can calculate moisture content, crude protein (CP), relative feed Value (RFV), relative forage quality (RFQ), and additional information including mineral content and nitrate levels. The K-State publication [MF3177 Forage Sampling Procedures and Equipment](#) gives more information on taking a quality, representative sample of various stored forages. Visit with your local Extension Agent to help determine the best test for your situation.

After hay is sourced and purchased; storing and feeding to minimize waste should be the goal. If hay is not stored inside, locate hay bale yards in an elevated, well-drained area out in the open with easy access in the winter for feeding. Rows should line up north to south, at least 3 ft apart, so sunlight will reach a greater portion of the bale. This will help evaporate moisture from the bales and the ground around them quickly.

If possible, weigh bales to get accurate weights when planning winter feeding delivery. Feeding only what your livestock needs in a 24-hour period helps reduce waste. Utilizing feeders will help reduce waste as well. If feeding hay that may contain noxious/invasive weeds or non-native forage species, feed in a designated area, so if a problem does develop, it can be kept isolated and, hopefully, controlled. Not bringing in these problems in harvested forage is a better plan.