

HAY FEEDING

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Start with a forage test. It is difficult to visually appraise hay accurately and forage tests are relatively inexpensive. An economical supplement program is difficult to implement without forage testing. Either too much, too little, or the wrong kind of supplement will be fed unless feeding decisions are based on a forage test and rations are developed based on the results of that test. Talk to and encourage your producers about having their forages tested. It can save them money.

Significant hay losses during feeding can be prevented if certain feeding management practices are implemented. Probably the most common method of avoiding large package hay loss during feeding is to use a hay "ring" or other type of hay feeder, such as a wagon which has been modified to allow hay feeding. A number of cattle producers advocate unrolling large round bales for feeding. This will work if cattle are provided the correct amount of hay for one feeding when the hay is unrolled. However, excess hay will quickly become bedding. Mechanical hay unrollers are available, but alternative methods, such as unrolling on a hillside, may work in certain areas. Exercise caution when unrolling hay on a hillside, because a large round bale can become a safety hazard. Other feeding tips are outlined.

- **Stay out of muddy areas when feeding.** A rocky outcrop or old road bed works well for minimizing mud. Other producers create a bed of coarse gravel.
- **Cut and remove the strings on the bales as they are fed.** This makes it easier on the

cows and may reduce the tangling of strings around the base of the hay feeder. These strings are also very easily entangled around the “bush hog” when clipping pastures.

- **Slightly hungry cows clean up better.** If stretching hay supplies, it may pay to allow cows a little longer to clean up previously fed hay. But, avoid this when cold fronts are approaching or if cows are thin (feed to maintain cows in body condition score of 5 or higher).