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Minimizing Loss in Storing Hay

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Many livestock producers store hay in long rows along the side of the hay field, for month's even years before feeding. Studies show that there is significant loss of quantity and nutritive value of that hay. Weathering of hay is favored by rainfall, humidity, and high temperatures. This weathering affects the dry matter content in the hay. The range of Dry Matter loss can range from 5 – 50%. This loss depends on how the bale was put up, and weather conditions while being stored, and if the hay was stored up off the ground. Typically more than half of the weathering loss occurs on the bottom of the bale. This loss can be protected by placing the rolls on railroad ties, wooden pallets, old tires, or a rock pad.

Some ways to protect hay loss in during storage is to use a bale wrapper, do not store hay under trees or low areas, or build a barn for storage. When stacking hay, place the flat ends together, and place rows 3 feet apart, preferable on a down slope for drainage. Another loss of hay is the actual feeding loss. This loss can be reduced by using hay ring feeders instead of feeding hay directly on the ground, and also by limiting the amount of hay to be fed so that hay is not walked on and stomped. Prioritize hay feeding, feeding loosely baled hay first or older hay first.

Conclusions:

1. Bale at 18% or less moisture or allow bales to dry for at least 24 hrs. prior to storage.
2. Keep hay fields free of weeds so as to form a tight thatch at baling.
3. Adjust the baler to form a dense bale.
4. Select a storage site that is well drained.
5. Orient bale placement to allow for maximum sunlight exposure and air circulation.
6. Protect sides and tops of bales with waterproof fabric.
7. Do not allow soil to bale contact. Store bales on pads, pallets, poles, or tires.