



Have You Looked Into Your Hay Quality Crystal Ball?

Based on conditions in the drought-stricken southern Great Plains, pasture conditions continue to decline. To further complicate the current situation, it is likely that much of the hay required for winter feeding will be imported from outside sources.

More often than not, low quality hay sells for the same price as high quality hay. The major difference is that low quality hay requires additional protein or energy supplementation which, in the long term, adds increased production costs. When purchasing hay, there are three questions you should ask to help you determine the potential value prior to having a forage analysis.

What type of hay?

This is important, because as a general rule of thumb, legume hays will usually be higher quality than grass hays. Also, cool-season grass hays should have higher quality than warm-season grass hays assuming each was properly harvested and stored.

When was the hay produced?

Generally, hay quality declines as hay gets older. For example, hay that was produced last year or the year before will have lower quality than hay produced this year, unless it was barn-stored.

What were the storage conditions of the hay?

Barn-stored hay will have lost little nutritional value. If it was high-quality hay going into the barn, it will still be high-quality hay coming out of the barn. Quality of hay stored outside and uncovered will decline.

Regardless of the answers to these questions, it is critical that all hay be properly sampled to estimate forage quality. Most forage quality analyses cost \$10 to 20 per sample. It is difficult to assign an economic advantage to forage quality testing. The cost to determine if additional protein or energy is needed would be recovered in feed savings or improved animal performance.

Forage quality requires proper sampling and interpretation to be of value. A forage analysis is the only way to determine whether or not additional supplementation is required. Also, feeding a large portion of hay for an extended period without a forage test should not occur due to the expense of providing supplemental feeds. Please see OSU Extension Fact Sheets PSS-2117 ([Forage Quality Interpretations](#)) and PSS-2589 ([Collecting Forage Samples for Analysis](#)) or contact your county extension educator for more information.

Daren Redfearn, Extension Forage and Pasture Management Specialist
daren.redfearn@okstate.edu