K-STATE Research and Extension | Wildcat District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Proper Forage Sampling Procedures

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Hay bales can be an effective and reliable feed source for livestock as the weather turns cold and dreary. When it comes to feeding or selling hay through the winter, one thing that should never be neglected is to get the hay properly tested. The information gained from forage sampling will help to better determine the hay's market value and ration formulation for livestock.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service recommends the following forage sampling procedures:

- **Sample by forage lot.** A forage lot is hay or silage taken from the same location, field, or farm, the same cutting (within a 48-hour period) at the same plant maturity, with similar amounts of grass, weeds, rain damage, or preservative treatment. Every field and cutting is different, so do not combine hays of different qualities or cuttings into one composite sample.
- **Sample at the optimum time.** Collect hay or silage samples as close to the time of feeding or sale as possible. Sampling immediately before feeding accounts for any heating or weathering losses that may have occurred during storage.
- **Select a sharp, well-designed coring device.** It is important to get a representative sample of forages to be tested. This is most effectively achieved by using a probe that is 12 to 24 inches in length and has an inside diameter of 3/8 to 1 inch. A greater number of small samples are more representative than fewer large samples. To sample bales and stacks of hay, take at least 20 cores that are 12 to 15 inches deep.
- **Keep good records.** Record name, date the crop was harvested, date sampled, and an identifier code or number for the lot on the bag with a permanent marker. The information will be useful when test results are received to help identify lots for correct feeding or marketing.

- **Ship samples immediately.** Ship or deliver samples to the laboratory as soon as possible to prevent moisture loss and microbial deterioration of the sample. It is best to deliver samples early in the week to be sure the samples don't sit in the lab over the weekend or through holidays.

Sampling hay and forages can be very beneficial for both feeding the correct nutrient values and optimizing marketing strategies, but it is important to remember, forage analysis results are only as good as the sample provided to the laboratory.

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