

Reducing Winter Feed Costs Starts This Summer

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Minimizing hay waste is one method to reduce cow herd feed costs. As costs increase minimizing waste becomes increasingly important. Many storage management practices will not increase costs, for example place bales tightly end to end oriented in rows running north and south on a slope. Orienting hay this way minimizes the exposed bale face and allows the sun to pass over and dry the entire bale rather than just the south side. Putting minimum of three to four feet of space between rows allows adequate air flow and sun exposure to permit drying, bale rows touching each other allows water to run off one bale into the middle of the other and minimizes drying on the bottom half of the bale. Proper bale yard location can also minimize hay waste without increasing storage costs. Do not store bales in waterways, low lying areas, under tree lines or in shaded areas since these areas either concentrate water into the bale or minimize drying after rain.

Breaking ground contact with hay is important to minimize waste since bales will wick moisture from the ground. Use a gravel pad, pallets, pipe or ties to break ground contact and minimize hay and nutrient loss due to water. Making dense bales that maintain shape minimizes the percent of the bale in contact with the ground. In addition to making dense bales make bales as large as your equipment can handle in order to concentrate more hay in the center of the bale.

Once hay is baled forage quality will only get worse due to storage and weathering. Storage losses make poor quality forage more expensive due to dry matter and water soluble nutrient losses leaving a greater portion of fiber behind. As hay quality increases the cost of storage losses will also increase. To determine if reducing hay storage losses will offset alternative hay storage methods divide the value of the hay by the percent fed after losses. So \$50 per ton hay becomes \$59 per ton hay of lesser quality if 15% is lost in storage. Barn storage will average 2-3% storage losses, while uncovered hay stored on the ground can result in 15-17% storage losses. Cattle also waste greater percentages of poorly stored hay during the feeding period in addition to the storage losses. Make plans today to reduce winter feed costs by minimizing hay storage losses.