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Choices: Saving \$130 per Cow, or Not
By Gene Schmitz, MU Extension Livestock Specialist

Before too long, beef producers will begin harvesting the 2013 hay crop. It's still unknown how the yields will turn out, but producers can plan ahead now for hay storage options.

A lot of ink has been spilled by people writing about the importance of proper hay storage methods, yet there still seems to be room for improvement in this area for many beef producers. I thought I would attack the problem again in a slightly different manner.

According to the National Agriculture Statistics Service, average hay yields for the state of Missouri for 2009 and 2010 (the latest data available) were approximately 2.0 tons per acre. One 1,300 pound cow will consume about 2.2 tons of hay in 120 days. Current market price for hay is approximately \$110 per ton, so a cow needs to eat approximately \$240 worth of hay during a 120 day winter feeding period. The amount of additional hay needed will depend on losses due to harvest, storage and feeding.

Focusing on just the storage losses, research from the University of Tennessee measured hay storage losses of 37% for uncovered hay stored on the ground, 19% for net wrapped hay stored on the ground, and 6% for hay stored in a barn. It is impossible to eliminate all storage losses, but they certainly can be minimized.

Based on this data, if hay is stored uncovered on the ground, a producer will need to harvest 1.75 acres of hay at a value of \$385 in order to have enough hay for the cow to eat during the winter. If the hay is net wrapped and stored outside on the ground, a producer will need to harvest 1.36 acres of hay at a value of \$299 in order to have enough hay for the cow for the winter. If hay is stored in a barn, 1.17 acres must be harvested at a value of \$257 to feed the cow during the winter. These figures do not include harvest or feeding losses, which can be substantial in some cases, and would add additional cost to the winter feed bill.

Producers who want to harvest 16 to 50 percent more acres than necessary should store hay outside, uncovered, and on the ground. Producers who want to increase hay needs by 50% should store hay outside, uncovered, and on the ground. Using current market prices, if a producer wants to spend an extra \$130 per cow for hay, store the hay outside, uncovered, and on the ground.

If hay must be stored outside, eliminating ground contact and covering the bales will dramatically reduce hay storage losses, reduce land needed for hay harvest, and reduce feed cost. Choices.

If you have additional questions on this topic, contact me at the Benton County Extension Center at (660) 438-5012 or by e-mail at schmitze@missouri.edu. University of Missouri Extension is an equal opportunity / ADA institution.