AG ENGINEERING EDGE
Answers to questions about structures, ventilation, soil, water, waste, energy, machinery and safety.

Hay tedders and swath inverters

Hay tedders are popular pieces of haying equipment in the Ozarks to speed up hay harvest. The idea behind tedders is to use ground-driven or PTO-powered, rotating tines to stir, spread and fluff up the mowed windrow of forage to improve air circulation and cut drying time. Research shows the drying rate may be increased up to 30 percent and cut total drying time by up to a day.

The problems with tedding are more leaf shatter and higher fuel, labor and machinery costs. If you plan to ted legume crops, it's best to do it within four (4) hours of mowing, to reduce leaf shatter. While the leaf shatter is not as evident on grass crops, the value of the grass hay is also lower and may not justify the time and equipment expense to ted it. In humid areas (like the Ozarks), an equally effective method is to cut, condition and dry the hay in a wide swath and then rake it into a windrow several hours before baling.

Swath inverters are devices that gently lift and turn the hay windrow over, laying it back on the ground upside down. Michigan State University research shows this process improves the drying rate about 15 percent, causes one-fifth of the leaf shatter loss incurred by tedding, and costs 20 percent more in labor, fuel and machinery costs than tedding. So like tedding, the total costs can be greater than the long-term gain in hay value.