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Tips On Reducing Hay Feeding Costs

Walt Prevatt, Don Ball, Darrell Rankins, and Mike Davis[1]
Auburn University

Feeding hay to cattle is often the largest expenditure a cattleman incurs. Unfortunately, continued increases in hay production input costs and alternative feed costs will mean higher hay prices. Most cattle farmers will be looking for ways to control hay feeding costs. The following five approaches (with multiple tips listed for each approach) are worth considering by cattlemen who want to get started or simply do a better job of reducing hay costs.

1. Reduce the number of days necessary to feed hay
    a. Adopt a controlled breeding season that will reduce the number of days necessary to feed hay
    b. Buy/lease more pastureland
    c. Graze crop residues to increase the number of days of grazing
    d. Use rotational/limit/strip grazing of summer pastures to increase the number of days of grazing
    e. Use rotational/limit/strip grazing of cool season pastures to increase the number of days of grazing
    f. Use forward grazing of pastures to increase utilization and the number of days of grazing
    g. Stockpiling forage for later grazing works well with virtually any forage crop, but especially well with tall fescue
    h. Feed by-products feedstuffs that provide more nutrition than hay per dollar of investment
    i. Use timely weed control early in the growing season to increase pasture forage yield.
    j. Within the limits of soil types and sites, use various forage species that provide pasture forage at different times of the year
    k. Select (where possible) varieties that fill in gaps of low pasture availability
    l. If commercially feasible, irrigate to extend the grazing season and increase forage yield
    m. Use soil testing to determine the recommended levels of fertilizer and lime for forage production
    n. Use timely fertilization and liming applications to increase forage production, assuming the forage produced can be efficiently utilized

Table 1. Dollars savings from reducing the number of days of feeding hay per 100 cows*.

Hay Reduction	Reduced Days of Hay Feeding						
(Lbs./Day/Hd.)	10	20	30	40	50	60	70
5	$188	$375	$563	$750	$938	$1,125	$1,313
10	$375	$750	$1,125	$1,500	$1,875	$2,250	$2,625
15	$563	$1,125	$1,688	$2,250	$2,813	$3,375	$3,938
20	$750	$1,500	$2,250	$3,000	$3,750	$4,500	$5,250
25	$938	$1,875	$2,813	$3,750	$4,688	$5,625	$6,563
30	$1,125	$2,250	$3,375	$4,500	$5,625	$6,750	$7,875

*Assumes a $75 per ton hay feeding cost for 100 brood cows.

2. Reduce the cost of hay
    a. Buy hay during hay season
    b. Buy hay based on a price per ton to ensure you get what you pay for
    c. Buy hay in quantity to receive a lower price
    d. Buy hay that meets a given level of nutrition (at least 10.5% CP and as much TDN as possible)
    e. Custom hire hay harvest
    f. Lower hay production costs by using legumes as a source of nitrogen
    g. Lower hay production costs by using alternative fertilizers (broiler litter or other organic materials) as a source of nutrients
    h. Lower hay production costs by harvesting excess pasture
    i. Lower hay production costs by sharing equipment
    j. Store and feed hay close to where hay will be consumed

Table 2. Dollars savings from reducing the cost of hay raised or purchased for 100 cows*.

Hay Fed	Reduced Feeding Hay Cost ($/Ton)						
(Lbs./Day/Hd.)	$5	$10	$15	$20	$25	$30	$35
5	$150	$300	$450	$600	$750	$900	$1,050
10	$300	$600	$900	$1,200	$1,500	$1,800	$2,100
15	$450	$900	$1,350	$1,800	$2,250	$2,700	$3,150
20	$600	$1,200	$1,800	$2,400	$3,000	$3,600	$4,200
25	$750	$1,500	$2,250	$3,000	$3,750	$4,500	$5,250
30	$900	$1,800	$2,700	$3,600	$4,500	$5,400	$6,300

*Assumes 120 days of hay feeding for 100 brood cows.

3. Reduce hay waste (storage and feeding waste) and associated problems
    a. Store hay in a cost-efficient and effective manner (pole barn, rock base with tarp, bale wrapping, plastic bags, haylage, etc.)
    b. Feed hay in a more cost-efficient manner (feed a limited amount of hay daily to enhance utilization in a restricted area, roll it out on pasture, place it in cones or panels to prevent trampling, waste, etc.)
    c. Store and feed hay close to where hay will be consumed
    d. Move feeding areas around pasture to minimize hay waste and pasture damage
    e. Feed animals a balanced ration based on forage analyses

Table 3. Dollars savings from reducing hay storage and feeding waste for 100 cows*.

Reduced Hay	Reduced Hay Storage Waste						
Feeding Waste	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%	30%	35%
1%	$675	$1,238	$1,800	$2,363	$2,925	$3,488	$4,050
2%	$788	$1,350	$1,913	$2,475	$3,038	$3,600	$4,163
3%	$900	$1,463	$2,025	$2,588	$3,150	$3,713	$4,275
4%	$1,013	$1,575	$2,138	$2,700	$3,263	$3,825	$4,388
5%	$1,125	$1,688	$2,250	$2,813	$3,375	$3,938	$4,500
6%	$1,238	$1,800	$2,363	$2,925	$3,488	$4,050	$4,613
7%	$1,350	$1,913	$2,475	$3,038	$3,600	$4,163	$4,725

*Assumes 120 days of hay feeding at 25 lbs/head/day with hay feeding cost of $75 per ton.

4. Reduce the amount of hay fed per animal.
    a. Compare the per-unit feed cost of nutritional requirements of cattle
    b. Feed cheaper alternative by-product feedstuffs (gin trash, broiler litter, etc.)
    c. Feed hay on pasture that is well drained and heavily sodded (?)
    d. Group the animals by age groups to minimize feed use

Table 4. Dollars savings from reducing the amount of hay fed per head per day for 100 cows*.

Reduced	Reduced Pounds of Hay Fed Per Head Per Day						
Days Fed	1	5	10	15	20	25	30
1	$4	$19	$38	$56	$75	$94	$113
10	$38	$188	$375	$563	$750	$938	$1,125
20	$75	$375	$750	$1,125	$1,500	$1,875	$2,250
30	$113	$563	$1,125	$1,688	$2,250	$2,813	$3,375
40	$150	$750	$1,500	$2,250	$3,000	$3,750	$4,500
50	$188	$938	$1,875	$2,813	$3,750	$4,688	$5,625
60	$225	$1,125	$2,250	$3,375	$4,500	$5,625	$6,750

*Assumes 120 days of hay feeding with a hay feeding cost of $75 per ton.

5. Reduce the number of animals being fed hay
    a. Adopt a controlled breeding season and cull open cows
    b. Cull poor producing cows
    c. Separate cows with excess body condition and limit their consumption of hay

Table 5. Dollars savings from reducing the number of animals fed hay*.

Hay Reduction	Reduced Number of Animals Fed Hay						
Lbs./Hd./Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	$5	$9	$14	$18	$23	$27	$32
5	$23	$45	$68	$90	$113	$135	$158
10	$45	$90	$135	$180	$225	$270	$315
15	$68	$135	$203	$270	$338	$405	$473
20	$90	$180	$270	$360	$450	$540	$630
25	$113	$225	$338	$450	$563	$675	$788
30	$135	$270	$405	$540	$675	$810	$945

*Assumes 120 days of hay feeding with a hay feeding cost of $75 per ton.

If you are looking for ways to lower your cattle production costs and an opportunity to improve profitability, adopting one or more of these tips on reducing your hay feeding costs will help you get it done. We encourage you to study each of these tips before the hay feeding season and make a list of those that you wish to implement in your operation. Decide on a time table to implement the management change(s) and monitor your progress. Be sure to document your dollar savings and share your success with other cattle farmers.

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[1]Walt Prevatt is Extension Specialist and Professor, Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, Don Ball is Extension Agronomist and Professor, Agronomy, Darrell Rankins is Extension Animal Scientist and Professor, Animal and Dairy Science, and Mike Davis is Extension Specialist, Blackbelt Research and Extension Center.