TESTING FOR HAY QUALITY

How much did the spring and summer's weather affect the feed value of your hay? You don't know? Then forage test.

Nearly every bushel of corn has similar nutrient concentration, but with hay it varies considerably. Why does this happen? Well, there are many causes. For example, leafiness of the hay, or maturity of the plant when your hay was cut, or even how you handled the hay during raking and baling all can affect its feed value.

This year, weather conditions have made things more complicated. This spring's floods and cool, wet weather caused many folks to delay first cutting or got rain-damaged hay. Leaf diseases, mature plants, and other factors made much alfalfa lower in quality. During summer we had periods of hot and very humid weather that often caused plants to burn off their easily digested nutrients at night, leaving us with hay that looks really good but is high in fiber and low in energy.

Grass hay might be even more difficult to predict. Some fields had fewer seedheads than normal. This might give higher quality hay, but if harvest was delayed in hopes of increasing yield or if the heat affected grass quality like it affects alfalfa, grass hay quality might actually be lower. And when growth is stimulated by extra rain, plants use many nutrients for increased tonnage instead of quality.

And I haven't even mentioned all the different forages used on prevented planting acres. Different species harvested late in the year; who knows what the protein and TDN levels are like.

So you see, this year, just like always, forage testing is important. It is the only way that you can find out for sure ahead of time what the feed value is of your hay.

So gather samples now for testing, before feeding your animals and before it's too late.

If you have any questions, or would like more information, you can contact me by calling 620-793-1910, by email at aboor@ksu.edu or just drop by the office located at 1800 12th street in Great Bend. This is Alicia Boor, one of the Agriculture and Natural Resources agents for the Cottonwood District which includes Barton and Ellis counties. Have a good week!