Bale Hay at Proper Maturity and Moisture Content

Hay, hay and more hay! It has been difficult to harvest hay this past week due to the cool temperatures and rainfall every few days. Hopefully, we will have had some dry weather to harvest hay this week. It typically rains often during early May when our forages are still leafy and at the correct stage of maturity to harvest for hay. We often have to harvest hay in late May or June when the weather is typically dryer and the forages more mature. Remember as hay gets too mature, fiber content goes up and digestibility goes down.

Let’s get to one of the hardest thing to do when it comes to making hay. Getting it baled at the proper moisture content. Variety may be the spice of life, but it can make knowing when to bale difficult. That's because the proper moisture content for baling hay depends on the kind of hay you are baling.

You usually can bale grass hays at 20 percent moisture content without fear of heating or spoilage in storage. If you use preservatives, such as propionic acid, the moisture content can be as high as 30 percent. But, we prefer 25 percent. Why can the moisture be content be higher with preservatives? Hay will continue to dry in storage if treated with preservatives. Preservatives kill many of the micro-organisms which cause heating, molding and storage.

Buffered acids are less corrosive to machinery. The large, round baler was heralded has the “all-weather” baler when it was introduced several years ago. Many farmers took this to mean they could bale hay at higher moisture contents than with the conventional square balers.

Actually, moisture content should be 1-2 percent lower when using a large round baler than when using a conventional baler on the same type hay. That’s because a conventional square bales can continue drying after baling. Only the surface layers of a large round bale will continue to dry after baling. The hay in the core usually won’t dry as much during the critical period when heating and spoilage are likely to occur.

If you bale hay at moisture levels considered unsafe, spoilage is likely. Even bale fire can occur. If you fear your hay may have been baled at a high moisture level, store large round bales outside until the possibility of heating has passed. For most types of hay, about two weeks is enough. For sorghum-sudan grass, watch it carefully for another 30 days after putting it inside. Wheat hay can also heat up long after the two week waiting period. If you would like to check the temperature of your hay, visit our UT-TSU Extension Office–Coffee County for a compost thermometer which can be used to check the temperature of hay! If the temperature reaches 140 degrees F, a hay fire may occur.

Most large, round bales will lose up to 25-30 percent of the hay in the bale if stored outside on the ground uncovered. Covering bales and using a gravel base to keep hay off the ground can cut storage losses to less than 10 percent, in many cases. Typical losses with large, round bales stored inside are 3-7 percent.

Reduce the Risk of Ticks in Your Yard and Home

Did you know there are steps you can take to reduce the risk of ticks in your yard? Researchers with the University of Tennessee, Institute of Agriculture have practical advice both for landscaping and managing your pets to minimize the risk of ticks and tick bites.

Graham Hickling, director of the UT Center for Wildlife Health, advises homeowners to keep their grass mowed and to remove leaf litter, brush and tall weeds from around the home and at the lawn’s edge. Gravel, woodchips or dry mulch can help keep ticks away from paths and children’s play structures. If tick problems become severe, consider employing a pest management company to apply a chemical barrier treatment around such areas.

Another tip is to use plantings that do not attract deer and other wildlife. If deer are common in your area, exclude them from your yard by fencing. Deer frequently carry ticks.

To protect your pets, minimize the time that dogs and cats spend outdoors in areas with leaf litter, brush and tall weeds. Always check your pets for ticks when they come back indoors.

Discuss with your veterinarian the various treatments available that can help your pet avoid tick bites and learn the signs your pet might exhibit if affected by a tick-borne disease.

These practical tips can help you minimize the risk of ticks on your pets and in your home.

For more information, visit website for the Companion Animal Parasite Council at http://www.capcvet.org/capc-recommendations/ticks/