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EXTENSION NOTES

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Review Your Hay Storage Options

Hay is a valuable commodity for livestock producers and prices fluctuate from year-to-year due to weather, supply, and other factors. With hay season under way, now is the time to think about ways to store the hay you produce this year to reduce storage losses and get the most from your hard work.

A common storage method in Kentucky is leaving large round bales stored outside on the ground. This method requires no investment but leaves hay out in the weather resulting in the largest possible dry matter loss. Storage losses in Kentucky can run up to 30 percent or more during a normal year.

Dry matter loss can be reduced by as much as 38 percent by simply breaking contact between the bale and the ground. Storing hay on a gravel pad would break this contact. This is still a rather inexpensive proposition, and potential savings in dry matter loss are significant. Additional dry matter loss savings can be achieved by covering these bales with a simple reusable tarp while on the gravel pad.

Other tips for minimizing losses during outside storage include the following:

- Make sure water drains away quickly. If possible, store bales near the top of a sloping area. Rows should run up and down to avoid trapping water.
- If feasible, place rows on the southern exposure and run them north to south.
- Good air flow for drying is important, so store bales in a sunny location and not under trees. The flat ends of the bales should be butted together, but the rounded sides should not touch (unless the rows are going to be covered with plastic). Allowing 3 feet between the rows allows for good air circulation.

Another option available to hay producers is the plastic wrapping of bales stored on the ground. This option has the potential to reduce dry matter loss into single digits. However, the range in dry matter loss may be wide as holes or wrapping problems can greatly increase the loss. Disposal of the wrap can be an issue.

The final option available to the hay producer is storing hay under roof. This option requires the largest capital investment and most likely will be the most expensive on a per bale basis. However, it minimizes the potential loss and may have other uses when hay is not being stored. Structures such as hoops have become more common in Kentucky because they are cheaper to construct and result in about the same dry matter loss as a conventional shed. Producers considering storage under roof should explore all options to determine the most cost-effective structure. As hay has become more expensive, the benefits of improved hay storage have increased.

June 3, 2025

Before considering storage options, the producer should know how much hay he or she produces each year and the market value of that hay. As one evaluates a potential hay storage option, they should consider three primary factors: the cost of storage on a per bale basis, the useful life of the investment, and the expected dry matter loss.

For more information about minimizing losses in hay storage, contact your Carter County Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

Upcoming Events:

- **Hike & Learn** – June 6th in Rowan County. Visit carter.ca.uky.edu/events/hike-learn-13 for more information.
- **Extension District Board Meeting** – June 10th at 10:00 AM
- The **Olive Hill Farmer's Market** is located in the Save-a-Lot parking lot and will open on Monday, June 16th at 3:00 PM. The **Grayson Farmer's Market** will open on Saturday, June 21st at 9:00 AM. The market is located in the shed behind the Extension Office.