

Texas Dairy Matters

Higher Education Supporting the Industry

MANAGE YOUR FORAGE NEEDS

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Whether it's low milk prices, drought conditions, high grain prices or improved profitability everyone needs to look closely at forage needs. At the end of each growing season take the time to evaluate your current forage situation.

Start by conducting an inventory of all the feed you have on hand. Record the tonnage on hand and any information on quality. If you haven't had your forage tested, do so now. Match the nutrient needs of your concentrate to the quality of your forage to save dollars either directly by reducing cost or indirectly by improving production.

Next determine how much forage you will need until you harvest your next crop. If you don't have enough forage on hand, start shopping now when prices are probably lower than they will



be during the middle of the winter or summer. Depending upon the price, consider extending your forage with cottonseed hulls if they are more economical than buying forages.

Store the feed you have to minimize losses. Store round bales on a gravel base or elevated if at all possible, under cover in a barn is even better. As much as 30 percent of the bale can be lost when hay is stored outside on the bare ground.

Your choice of feeding method influences how much forage you lose as well. Minimize forage losses by chopping hay and including it in a total mixed ration rather than in round bale rings.

Be selective about which cows receive your highest quality forages. Feed your highest production strings your top quality forage and reserve lower quality forage for your low producers. This simple strategy can improve productivity and reduce feed costs per hundred pounds of milk produced.

Finally, if you have excess forage, think about whether you want to try to sell some of it this year. Although tax considerations should not be your sole reason for when you make sales, selling surpluses in one year might offset some losses suffered due to low milk prices resulting in reduced taxes in the long term.

Take the time now to assess your forage situation so you can manage the forages you have to optimize your dairies' returns.