

Hay Testing

When driving around the county, it's not an uncommon sight to see hay in the fields. While most of you know how to grow and bale hay, you may not be aware of the quality of your hay. To properly assess the quality of hay, you must conduct a forage test.

Why do we test?

Hay may look "good", but it is important to have a more detailed description of what the product will provide to livestock. To figure this out, it is encouraged to take a forage sample for analysis. This can allow you to say with confidence what your hay will provide to the people that purchase it. This may be especially important for "horse hay" producers, since they tend to pay a little more for their hay and will want to ensure that they are getting what they pay for.

How do we test?

The NCDA&CS, North Carolina Farm Feed Testing Service, will accept forage samples to analyze. Best results are obtained if you use a hay core sampler, which is available at the North Carolina Cooperative Extension-Avery County Center. If this method is used, take sample cores from 10-15 hay bales and fill a gallon size bag with the pooled samples. If sampling from square hay bales, take at the end, if sampling from round bales, take from the side. Each "lot" of hay should be sampled, "lot" is defined as hay from the same field and same cutting, that is stored under the same conditions.

What is the cost?

It is free if the forage is analyzed for nitrates, aflatoxins or mycotoxins. A complete analysis for moisture, protein, fiber, minerals, and etcetera will cost \$10.

Is my hay good or bad?

Interpretation of your analysis, and whether you can call your sample good or bad, really depends on what animals you are feeding. Animals that have lower maintenance requirements, may be able to get away with being fed a lower protein or TDN hay. Animal species also determines whether your hay will provide all necessary nutrients. Your local livestock agent can help you interpret your results and make recommendations.

How do I get started?

Contact Michelle South, Area Extension Agent-Livestock, at 828-733-8270 for assistance with hay sampling or interpretation of your analysis.

Please [click here](#) for the NCDA North Carolina Farm Feed Testing Service Form.

This article was originally written by [Stefani Sykes](#) and edited/updated by [Michelle South](#).