Saskatchewan Hay & Pasture Report

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Saskatchewan Forage Council, PO Box 308, Asquith, SK S0K 0J0
www.saskforage.ca office@saskforage.ca 306.329.3116

Inside This Issue:

Note from the Saskatchewan Forage Council

Welcome to the September edition of the 2015 Hay and Pasture Report. This will be the last edition of the report for 2015. To keep up to date on news in the Saskatchewan forage industry, contact the SFC to subscribe to our monthly eNews or check out our website.

This edition of the report includes articles on measuring feed quality in the field, methods of buying and selling hay and the Saskatchewan Pasture Tour. To celebrate the 2015 International Year of Soils, we have included articles on soil health and soil aggregate stability as well as links to Soil Health podcasts that may interest you. 2015 still promises to bring more soil health events and publications to educate producers and keep you up to date on the most recent soil health research. Every issue of the Report also contains the most recent Saskatchewan Agriculture Crop Report and a summary of forage market information from Saskatchewan and surrounding jurisdictions.

As always, we welcome your feedback and encourage anyone interested in being placed on our email distribution list to contact the SFC at office@saskforage.ca. You may also want to visit our website www.saskforage.ca for regular news and information related to the forage industry.

Saskatchewan Agriculture Crop Report

(For the period ending August 31, 2015)

Warm and relatively dry weather has allowed producers to make good progress on harvest. Twenty-nine per cent of the crop is now combined and an additional 30 per cent is swathed or ready to straight-cut. The five-year (2010-2014) average for this time of year is 14 per cent combined and 26 per cent swathed or ready to straight-cut.

Rainfall this past week ranged from nil to 22 mm in some southeastern areas. Provincially, topsoil moisture conditions on cropland are rated as three per cent surplus, 78 per cent adequate, 17 per cent short and two per cent very short. Hay land and pasture topsoil moisture conditions are rated as one per cent surplus, 67 per cent adequate, 27 per cent short and five per cent very short.

Pasture conditions across the province are rated as four per cent excellent, 43 per cent good, 36 per cent fair, 14 per cent poor and three per cent very poor. At this

time, crop reporters are indicating that 11 per cent of the forage crops did not get cut or baled, mainly due to lack of growth.

The Ministry of Agriculture has a Forage, Feed and Custom Service listing for producers to advertise and source feed products. It is available at www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca/FeedForageListing.

To view the full report, click here.

Saskatchewan Pasture Tour

This year's Saskatchewan Pasture Tour was rained out, but that didn't stop over 40 attendees from enjoying indoor presentations, taking the time to network and share stories about what worked on their own operations. Presentation topics at this event on August 6th included: non-bloating legumes, the Environmental Farm Program, corn grazing management, native range management. Host producers Heath Tallentire and Terry Young also shared a wealth of information about their own innovative operations.

Forage samples on display at the Saskatchewan Pasture Tour

Measuring Feed Quality in the Field

Michael Thomas, August 12, 2015, Reprinted with permission from Grainews

In challenging economic times it is more important than ever to know the value of the alfalfa forage you are feeding your dairy or beef cattle. Whether you are blending alfalfa in a ration to maximize lactation, fertility and calf growth, or utilizing lesser-quality hay for dry cattle or replacements, you want to know that you are consistently getting the most value for your dollar.

Many of us have relied on core samples and traditional lab tests for years. Although we have all dealt with some variability between labs, the far greater problem is sampling the crop. With traditional core testing it is difficult to get a sample that represents the entire stack. In addition, it's common to have significant variation with a given bale. The challenges compound as we unknowingly add unrecognized variations in quality into feed rations, and then witness unexplained fluctuations in the cattle's production/performance levels.

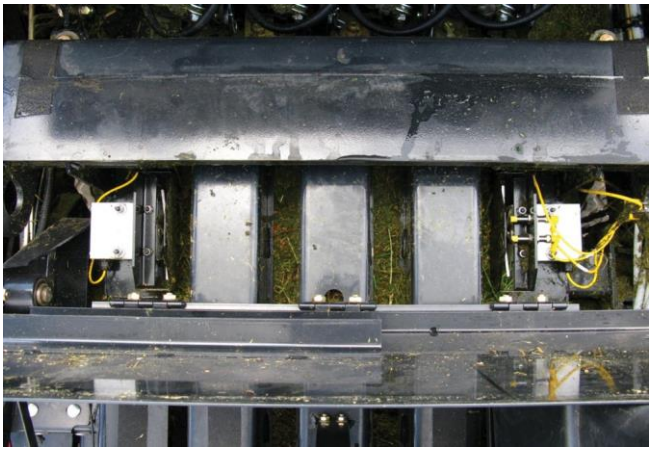
Today there is a new technology emerging in the arena of relative feed value (RFV) testing for alfalfa hay. Because it provides the vital data for every bale produced, this system will show precisely what relative feed value each bale is bringing to the ration. Hay producers will also find it to be a great marketing tool.

This new method of measuring RFV was developed by Harvest Tec of Hudson, Wisconsin, and tested against lab results of individual bales from eight farms over six states since 2013. Because the system calculates the RFV on every bale as it is

produced, the hay can be sorted into grades as it is stacked, and therefore be shipped to the customer with the same consistent RFV, bale for bale.

How RFV works

To use this technology, the hay producer acquires the software program from his equipment dealer, such as AGCO, New Holland and others, and downloads the program into the applicator or moisture-reading system on the baler. The operator then takes a scissor sample just before cutting, or a windrow sample at the time of cutting, and sends this sample to a lab.



These sensors are part of the Harvest Tec system for measuring feed quality of hay as it is baled in the field. Photo: Michael Thomas

At the time of baling, the operator enters the data from the lab sample into the system. The information from the sample is used to calibrate the system, allowing for the quality of the stand including variations in maturity and other factors.

"Grabbing a few windrow samples, sending them into the lab, and entering the results when I start is a lot easier than trying to core representative bales later on," says Gary McManus, owner of one of the test farms in Lakeview, Oregon.

Then as the operator bales the hay, the system uses the information from the lab sample as a baseline, representing the stand before any leaf shatter. As the baler operates, dual star wheel sensors measure crop moisture readings 96 times every three seconds to determine a moisture level of plus or minus one per cent accuracy. The baler's scale provides the bale weight to within two per cent accuracy.

Based on the premise that the majority of the nutrient value of alfalfa is in the leaf, and that more density equates to higher leaf-to-stem ratio, the system analyzes the moisture content and bale weight data. It then calculates the dry matter density and the RFV of each bale produced based on the sample previously sent to a lab. The operator can then use this information as it appears on the system's screen to calculate an average for a field.

A bale-tagging system can also be used to attach a radio-frequency identification tag (RFID) that can be read with a hand-held or stationary scanner from the point of retrieval from the field all the way to the feed ration.

The RFID tagger attaches a vinyl tag containing an RFID chip to the No. 6 twine on the bale; then writes valuable information to the tag before the bale is ejected from the chamber, including: bale moisture, weight, RFV, bale number, the time the bale was made, field location, and more.

System tested

Dr. Allen Young, Utah State University, performed some the first comparative tests during the crop season of 2013. This initial work was performed on farms owned and

operated by Utah State University Agricultural Experiment Station. Samples were taken from 546 bales from three fields over three cuttings.

"The system seems to work and appears to be a practical way to get a reasonable approximation of the quality of hay as it comes out of the field…" says Young. (For Young's full report, visit www.harvesttec.com, Relative Feed Value).

In addition to the preliminary RFV testing to determine the accuracy of the system, Young further sorted alfalfa bales into a feed ration balancing program to determine what effect this would have on projected milk output based on (metabolizable energy) ME and (metabolizable protein) MP.

These diets were formulated to utilize a high-forage diet. It is important to keep in mind that alfalfa grown in the intermountain area is more consistent that that grown in some other regions due to growing conditions.

"However, it is obvious from the scenarios where hay was sorted by CP per cent and RFV that there is variation within a field that can show changes in milk production of about three to four pounds ME milk, or four to six pounds MP milk (depending on the field; in our rations MP was more limiting than ME)," says Young.

The results uniformly demonstrate that the bales tested by the in-field RFV system closely follow the values generated by laboratory tested core samples.

Farmers say it works

Over the past two growing seasons additional private studies have been performed on eight farms across six states, culminating in over 3,000 bales tested by the in-field RFV system and compared with core samples sent to conventional laboratories.

These bales were produced under different conditions of temperature, alfalfa varieties, cuttings, irrigated and non-irrigated fields, and made by different makes of balers and bale sizes. The results uniformly demonstrate that the bales tested by the in-field RFV system closely follow the values generated by laboratory tested core samples.

"Our calculated value represents the RFV of the entire bale," says Jeff Roberts, president of Harvest Tec. "We feel this system is revolutionary in the production of alfalfa. We are adding precision to the testing of hay that was not available before."

Don Leonard of Brush Colorado, participated in the study in 2014. "The values from the Harvest Tec system on the baler are pretty close to the values coming back from the lab taken with a Colorado Hay Probe — within five points and that is pretty amazing," says Leonard. "What has surprised me is the difference in RFV from bale to bale. The Harvest Tec system picks that up."

Gary McManus, of Lakeview, Oregon, says "What is really useful is having the RFV on the screen while I am baling. I thought as moisture increases, RFV would also increase, which I learned is not always the case. I went out one morning and was watching the RFV monitor, thinking 'this hay should test better than that,' so I shut down and went back to the house. I came back to that field later that night and sure enough, the RFV jumped 20 points over what it had been that morning."

To read the full article, click here.

To learn more about about RFV testing, visit harvesttech.com.

Methods of Buying and Selling Hay

Colby Elford BSc, PAg, Regional Livestock Specialist, Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture

Talk to five different people about trading hay and you will hear five different units used in the transactions ($/bale, $/ton, $/tonne, $/pound, $/acre). This ambiguity is the source of some confusion and it is time to sort it out. Producers need to be very careful when they are discussing a hay transaction to ensure that both parties are in agreement about how the hay will be measured. The two most common ways hay is measured in transactions is by the bale and by the ton. However, hay is sometimes sold by the tonne or pound and standing hay may be traded on a dollars per acre basis.

By The Bale

"I can get last year's hay from my neighbour for $70/bale. Is that a good deal?"
There are a lot of factors that need to be discussed in order to provide an answer to this question, but for the purpose of this article we will focus on trading hay by the bale. Bales are not a uniform or standard form of measurement. Often, hay is traded by the bale because the math is easy - count the number of bales, and multiply by the agreed upon price. In reality, if the bales weigh 1,000 pounds, the hay costs much more than if the bales weigh 1,500 pounds. It is very common for people to overestimate the weight of their bales. In these cases, the purchaser may not be getting all the hay that he paid for.

By Weight

In Saskatchewan, the most common way to purchase hay is by weight. There is some ambiguity in this method, as well. Even though Canada officially converted to the metric system in the 1970s, it is still common for hay to be traded by the ton. However, some hay is sold by the tonne. These two measurements often sound the same when spoken, but their meaning is not synonymous. A ton is equal to 2,000 pounds; a tonne is equal to 1,000 kilograms, which in turn converts to 2,204.6 pounds. If you think that you are purchasing 200 tonnes of hay but only 200 *tons* are delivered, you may be about 30 bales short (1,400 lb bales). It is important to clarify these measurements before the deal is done.

One way to reduce the confusion is to trade hay by the pound (i.e. three cents per pound). This method is becoming more and more popular. Purchasing hay by the pound ensures all parties are certain of the units. Producers that are more comfortable with other forms of measurement (ton, tonne, etc.) can easily do a conversion while maintaining a continuity of units.

For example if hay is advertised at $0.03/pound, an interested buyer who purchases hay by the ton simply multiplies that number by the number of pounds in a ton.

$0.03/pound x 2,000 pounds = $60/ton

The conversion to tonne is also straightforward.

$0.03/pound x 2204.6 pounds = $66.14/tonne

Trading hay by weight also allows producers to be paid for every pound of hay that they sell. If they have a scale at home, they can weigh the bales before they leave the yard, or the can have each truck weighed after it is loaded.

By The Acre

Although it is much more limited, there is some standing hay sold in the province. Often this hay is sold by weight ($/ton, $/pound, etc.), similar to baled hay. However, the landlord may not be concerned with the hay yield. He may be more concerned with how much money that parcel of land is making him in comparison with similar crop land. Usually, establishment costs are determined on a per acre basis. So it may be easy for him to add a profit margin to his costs and sell his hay by the acre. In this case, the landlord is paid the same amount in good years as in poor. Producers purchasing hay in this manner must estimate the yield per acre to determine if the deal will be economical.

There will be a lot of hay traded this year. Dryer than normal conditions have limited pasture growth and hay fields are yielding less than expected. If you are a producer who is going to buy hay, make sure that you know the units that you are trading in so that you get what you pay for.

For more information on this topic please contact the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

Soil Health Management

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Soil works for you if you work for the soil by using management practices that improve soil health and increase productivity and profitability immediately and into the future. A fully functioning soil produces the maximum amount of products at the least cost. Maximizing soil health is essential to maximizing profitability. Soil will not work for you if you abuse it.
Managing for soil health (improved soil function) is mostly a matter of maintaining suitable habitat for the myriad of creatures that comprise the soil food web. This can be accomplished by disturbing the soil as little as possible, growing as many different species of plants as practical, keeping living plants in the soil as often as possible, and keeping the soil covered all the time.

Image: soil profile in corn field

Manage More by Disturbing Soil Less

Soil disturbance can be the result of physical, chemical or biological activities. Physical soil disturbance, such as tillage, results in bare and/or compacted soil that is destructive and disruptive to soil microbes, and it creates a hostile environment for them to live. Misapplication of farm inputs

can disrupt the symbiotic relationships between fungi, other microorganisms, and plant roots. Overgrazing, a form of biological disturbance, reduces root mass, increases runoff, and increases soil temperature. All forms of soil disturbance diminish habitat for soil microbes and result in a diminished soil food web.

Diversify Soil Biota with Plant Diversity

Plants use sunlight to convert carbon dioxide and water into carbohydrates that serve as the building blocks for roots, stems, leaves, and seeds. They also interact with specific soil microbes by releasing carbohydrates (sugars) through their roots into the soil to feed the microbes in exchange for nutrients and water. A diversity of plant carbohydrates is required to support the diversity of soil microorganisms in the soil. In order to achieve a high level of diversity, different plants must be grown. The key to improving soil health is ensuring that food and energy chains and webs consist of several types of plants or animals, not just one or two.

Biodiversity is ultimately the key to the success of any agricultural system. Lack of biodiversity severely limits the potential of any cropping system and increases disease and pest problems. A diverse and fully functioning soil food web provides for nutrient, energy, and water cycling that allows a soil to express its full potential. Increasing the diversity of a crop rotation and cover crops increases soil health and soil function, reduces input costs, and increases profitability.

Keep a Living Root Growing Throughout the Year

Living plants maintain a rhizosphere, an area of concentrated microbial activity close to the root. The rhizosphere is the most active part of the soil ecosystem because it is where the most readily available food is, and where peak nutrient and water cycling occurs. Microbial food is exuded by plant roots to attract and feed microbes that provide nutrients (and other compounds) to the plant at the root-soil interface where the plants can take them up. Since living roots provide the easiest source of food for soil microbes, growing long-season crops or a cover crop following a short-season crop, feeds the foundation species of the soil food web as much as possible during the growing season.

Healthy soil is dependent upon how well the soil food web is fed. Providing plenty of easily accessible food to soil microbes helps them cycle nutrients that plants need to grow. Sugars from living plant roots, recently dead plant roots, crop residues, and soil organic matter all feed the many and varied members of the soil food web.

Keep the Soil Covered as Much as Possible

Soil cover conserves moisture, reduces temperature, intercepts raindrops (to reduce their destructive impact), suppresses weed growth, and provides habitat for members of the soil food web that spend at least some of their time above ground. This is true regardless of land use (cropland, hayland, pasture, or range). Keeping the soil covered while allowing crop residues to decompose (so their nutrients can be cycled back into the soil) can be a bit of a balancing act. Producers must give careful consideration to their crop rotation (including any cover crops) and residue management if they are to keep the soil covered and fed at the same time.

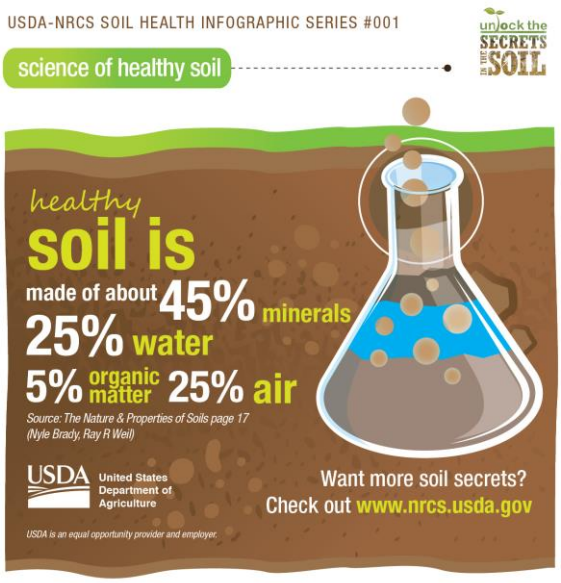
Soil Quality Indicators: Aggregate Stability

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Fact Sheet

Soil aggregates are groups of soil particles that bind to each other more strongly than to adjacent particles. Aggregate stability refers to the ability of soil aggregates to resist disintegration when disruptive forces associated with tillage and water or wind erosion are applied. Wet aggregate stability suggests how well a soil can resist raindrop impact and water erosion, while size distribution of dry aggregates can be used to predict resistance to abrasion and wind erosion.

Factors Affecting

Inherent- Aggregation and stability of soil aggregates are affected by predominant type and amount of clay, adsorbed cations, such as calcium and sodium, and iron oxide content. Expansion and contraction of clay particles as they become moist and then dry can shift and crack the soil mass and create aggregates or break them apart. Calcium, magnesium, iron, and aluminum stabilize aggregates via the formation of organic matter – clay bridges. In contrast, aggregate stability decreases with increasing amounts of exchangeable sodium. Dispersion is promoted when too many sodium ions accumulate between soil particles.



Dynamic - Aggregate stability is highly dependent on organic matter and biological activity in soil, and it generally increases as they increase. Fungal hyphae, thread-like structures used to gather resources, bind soil particles to form aggregates. Other soil organisms, like earthworms, secrete binding materials. Soil particles are also aggregated and stabilized by organic "glues" resulting from biological decomposition of organic matter. Physical disturbance, e.g. tillage, accelerates organic matter decomposition rates, and destroys fungal hyphae and soil aggregates. Soil biota help create aggregates and use them as habitat or refugia to escape predation.

Relationship to Soil Function

Changes in aggregate stability may serve as early indicators of recovery or degradation of soils. Aggregate stability is an indicator of organic matter content, biological activity, and nutrient cycling in soil. Generally the particles in small aggregates (<0.25 mm) are bound by older and more stable forms of organic matter. Microbial decomposition of fresh organic matter releases products (that are less stable) that bind small aggregates into large aggregates (>2-5 mm). These large aggregates are more sensitive to management effects on organic matter, serving as a better indicator of changes in soil quality. Greater amounts of stable aggregates suggest better soil quality. When the proportion of large to small aggregates increases, soil quality generally increases.

Problems with Poor Function

Aggregate stability is critical for infiltration, root growth, and resistance to water and wind erosion. Unstable aggregates disintegrate during rainstorms. Dispersed soil particles fill surface pores and a hard physical crust can develop when the soil dries.

Infiltration is reduced, which can result in increased runoff and water erosion, and reduced water available in the soil for plant growth. A physical crust can also restrict seedling emergence.

Wind normally detaches only loosely held particles on the soil surface, but as blowing soil particles are accelerated by the wind they hit bare soil with sufficient energy to break additional particles loose from weakly aggregated soil. This action increases the number of particles that can be picked up by the wind and abrade a physically-unprotected soil surface.

Practices that lead to poor aggregate stability include:
• Tillage methods and soil disturbance activities that breakdown plant organic matter, prevent accumulation of soil organic matter, and disrupt existing aggregates,
• Cropping, grazing, or other production systems that leave soil bare and expose it to the physical impact of raindrops or wind-blown soil particles,
• Removing sources of organic matter and surface roughness by burning, harvesting or otherwise removing crop residues,
• Using pesticides harmful to beneficial soil microorganisms.

Improving Aggregate Stability
Practices that keep soil covered physically protect it from erosive forces that disrupt aggregation, while also building organic matter. Any practice that increases soil organic matter, and consequently biological activity, improves aggregate stability. However, it can take several growing seasons or years for significant organic matter gains. In contrast, management activities that disturb soil and leave it bare can result in a rapid decline in soil organic matter, biological activity and aggregate stability.

Aggregates form readily in soil receiving organic amendments, such as manure. They also form readily where cover and green manure crops and pasture and forage crops are grown, and where residue management and/or reduced tillage methods are used.

Improving aggregate stability on cropland typically involves cover and green manure crops, residue management, sod-based rotations, and decreased tillage and soil disturbance. Aggregate stability declines rapidly in soil planted to a clean-tilled crop.

Pasture and forage plants have dense, fibrous root systems that contribute organic matter and encourage microbial activity. However, grazing and fertility must be managed to maintain stands and prevent development of bare areas or sparse vegetation.

Conservation practices resulting in aggregate stability favorable to soil function include:
• Conservation Crop Rotation
• Cover Crop
• Pest Management
• Prescribed Grazing
• Residue and Tillage Management
• Salinity and Sodic Soil Management
• Surface Roughening

Measuring Aggregate Stability

Measuring Water Stable Aggregates is described in the Soil Quality Test Kit Guide, Section I, Chapter 8, pp. 18 - 19. See Section II, Chapter 7, pp. 69 - 71 for interpretation of results.

Arshad MA, Lowery B, and Grossman B. 1996. Physical Tests for Monitoring Soil Quality. In: Doran JW, Jones AJ, editors. Methods for assessing soil quality. Madison, WI. P 123-41.

Kemper WD, Rosenau RC. 1986. Aggregate Stability and Size Distribution. In: Klute A, editor. Methods of soil analysis. Part 1. Physical and mineralogical methods. Madison, WI. p 425-42.

To view this and other Soil Quality Indicators Fact Sheets, click here.

"Soil Health To-Go" Audio Podcasts

Don't have time to sit down at a computer to hear from other farmers, ranchers and researchers about soil health topics? No problem. Load your audio device with "Soil Health To-Go" podcasts and listen when you're driving in your pickup, tractor or combine.

View the lists of podcasts and download them at the USDA NRCS Soil Health Podcasts page.

Saskatchewan Hay Market Report

Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture
www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca/FeedForageListing

For the week ending September 4, 2015 the Ministry of Agriculture Feed and Forage listing contained numerous listings for hay or straw for sale. Asking prices for mixed hay ranged from $110-459/metric tonne with approximately 20 listings for this product. Greenfeed asking prices averaged $145/metric tonne. There were few straw listings with varied prices based on old crop or new crop straw. Alfalfa hay asking prices ranged from $170-275/metric tonne, with eight listings at this time. There were four listings for pasture available to rent; however no prices were indicated. Standing feed was also on offer, with both greenfeed and mixed hay listed, while one offer of organic hay asked $132/metric tonne.

USDA Market News Service Hay Report

For the week ending July 24, 2015
The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) collects a wide variety of information from hay markets across the country. Presented below is information from those jurisdictions closest to Saskatchewan. For complete USDA hay market listings, please visit the USDA Market News webpage.

Weekly Montana Hay Report
Compared to last week: Alfalfa was steady this week and excellent movement was seen across the state. Demand for Alfalfa was moderate this week on moderate offerings. Grass hay experienced much of the same movement volumes as alfalfa.
The western half of the state continues to remain in extreme drought and this region continues to see the best demand for both grass and alfalfa. Wildfires continue to cause smoky, hazy conditions for much of the central and eastern half of the state. This has forced many producers to watch the forecast very closely as hay drying times have increased drastically. All prices are dollars per ton and FOB unless otherwise noted.

Wyoming, Western Nebraska, and Western South Dakota Hay Report
Compared to last week: All classes traded steady on very light demand. According to Sandra Hansen at Star Herald, TORRINGTON, Wyoming — A Goshen County industry that opened its doors in 1995 is now set to close them, 20 years later.
Wyoming Ethanol LLC arrived with the aid of a 40-cent per gallon tax credit from the state of Wyoming, and now the end of that credit is leading to the end of the local operation. Third cutting is under way in areas and the weather seems to be cooperating. All prices dollars per ton FOB stack in large square bales and rounds, unless otherwise noted. Most horse hay sold in small squares. Prices are from the most recent reported sales.

Prices are for the week ending August 28, 2015

	Eastern Wyoming	Western South Dakota	Montana
Alfalfa			
Supreme	$206	-	$200-225**
Premium	$165-200 $215**	-	-
Good	$90*	$76-81 $65*	$150-170
Fair	-	-	$115-140 $120*
Utility	$60	-	$100
Alfalfa-Grass			
Premium	$140	$125	-
Good	$47.5*	$75-90	$125*
Fair		$30*	-
Grass	-	-	$90-120*
Timothy	-	-	$120* $150-225**
Barley Straw	-	-	$40-55

All prices in U.S. dollars per ton FOB stack in large square bales unless otherwise noted. Most horse hay sold in small squares.
** large rounds **small squares*

Hay Quality Designations - Physical Descriptions:

Supreme: Very early maturity, pre bloom, soft fine stemmed, extra leafy - factors indicative of very high nutritive content. Hay is excellent colour and free of damage. Relative Feed Value (RFV): >185

Premium: Early maturity, i.e., pre-bloom in legumes and pre head in grass hays; extra leafy and fine stemmed - factors indicative of a high nutritive content. Hay is green and free of damage. RFV: 170-185

Good: Early to average maturity, i.e., early to mid-bloom in legumes and early head in grass hays; leafy, fine to medium stemmed, free of damage other than slight discoloration. RFV: 150-170

Fair: Late maturity, i.e., mid to late-bloom in legumes and headed in grass hays; moderate or below leaf content, and generally coarse stemmed. Hay may show light damage. RFV: 130-150

Utility: Hay in very late maturity, such as mature seed pods in legumes or mature head in grass hays, coarse stemmed. This category could include hay discounted due to excessive damage and heavy weed content or mould. RFV: <130

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Saskatchewan Forage Council
PO Box 308
Asquith, SK S0K 0J0
Phone: 306.329.3116
Email: office@saskforage.ca

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