

Storage strategies for over mature hay and securing extra forages

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As growers continue to struggle with the harvest of over-mature first cutting in many areas of the state, the question is what to do with all of this high tonnage, low quality feed. Harvest and storage planning has been a point of interest in the past few years and these concepts apply (albeit in a slightly different way) to dealing with this year's late first cutting. See articles: [Dynamic Harvest Schedules](#) and [Strategic Forage Storage Planning](#).

Storage of low quality first cutting

The faster this crop is removed, the more opportunity for additional cuttings. How this crop is managed may improve or worsen your forage situation. There are a number of potential options:

Temporary storage

With a limited footprint for forage storage on many farms, filling up available storage space with first cutting and leaving yourself short on space for future (hopefully higher quality crops), may worsen the already challenging situation. Ideally all forages can be stored in a properly sited storage but we know that is not always feasible. While we know that storage losses will often be higher in temporary storage areas, placing low quality feed in a place that is susceptible to these higher losses may be the lesser of two evils in comparison to storing higher quality forages in less than ideal situations. Silo bags or baleage can offer flexibility with this but even with these storage methods siting them in less than ideal locations can lead to excess losses.

Dry hay

This may add storage flexibility and increase the chances to sell excess crop but can slow the harvest process at a time when quick removal from the field is preferred.

Recycle back onto the field

How many tons of "non-lactating" quality forage or bedding do you need? Is it better to chop some hay back onto the ground instead of taking up valuable storage space with this low value crop?

Siting temporary storage

If temporary storage is needed, there are steps that can reduce the challenges associated with doing so. Some key consideration can be found in [Making the ideal temporary forage storage site](#).

- Consult your farms nutrient management plan
- Choose a well drained location

- Use a firm base
- Avoid areas of high risk for surface runoff
- Silo bags are a much better option than a small drive over pile, particularly on unimproved bases
- Size pile for manageable face at feedout
- Pay close attention to proper packing and covering piles

Future Cuttings

High quality forage is always very valuable but its potential scarcity this year makes it even more so. Storage management is always critical and extra care to manage every thing that the farm has influence over will pay even more dividends when the commodity is in short supply.

- Harvest
 - Minimize ash content
 - Forage cutting height
 - Properly setup rakes, mergers, harvester pickup heads
 - Minimize time for cutting the ensiling
 - Wide Swathing
 - [SCNY CCE Team: Hay Harvest in a Difficult Year: Time to Give Wide Swathing a Try?](#)
 - Minimize leaf loss in legumes
- Storage
 - [Pack, Pack, Pack](#)
 - Use proven inoculants
 - Exclude oxygen by covering with plastic
 - 2 layer system with oxygen barrier
 - Uniform weight (tires, sandbags) across plastic

Securing additional quality forage

- Terminate poor hay stand and plant summer annual
 - [Winterkill, what to do now](#)
- Plant winter grain for early spring forage harvest
- Survey the neighborhood
 - Grain farm with corn that may not mature for grain
 - Trade crop for manure
 - Prevented Plant Grain acres
 - USDA has changed the qualifications for [2019 prevented planting acres to allow forage harvest of cover crops after September 1st](#). This may allow for extra forages to be grown on otherwise fallow acres.
 - *Check with Crop Insurance and USDA representative to confirm that your plans for cover crop forage will not affect your prevented planting payments.*
 - Purchase future cuttings of standing hay from livestock farm who may not need the high quality feed
 - Trade “livestock” quality first cutting for higher quality future cuttings