

# Cut Hay At Right Time Or Lose Much Feed Value

Hay cut at the proper time provides greater TDN and more crude protein for livestock, says Howell Wheaton, University of Missouri-Columbia Extension agronomist. When the hay cutting season rolls around, Wheaton suggests farmers keep in mind that the first cutting of alfalfa should be made when it reaches the bud

stage. Cut it then regardless of maturity of companion grass. Alfalfa-grass mixtures cut at this time contain about 65 per cent TDN and 20 per cent crude protein. If cut when alfalfa is at half bloom stage, the TDN is only 50-52 per cent; protein is only 12 per cent. That's close to a 20 per cent loss in TDN and a 40 per cent protein loss.

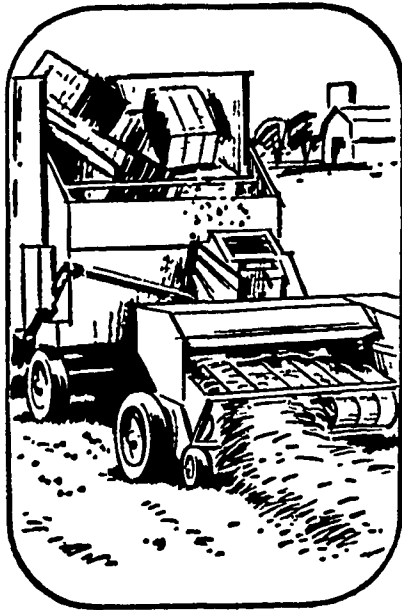
Wheaton says grasses follow the same decreasing value with respect to maturity. Fescue and orchardgrass are examples. Their crude protein content will often be as low as six per cent after blooming when seeds are beginning to form.

Overall losses due to late hay making can reach staggering proportions. Three sources can contribute to the loss of half the potential feed value of hay, Wheaton points out. They are:

- 1 Late cutting loss in digestibility, 20 per cent
  - 2 Wilting losses in the swath, 5 per cent
  - 3 Shattering of leaves, 25 per cent
- Shattering and wilting losses

are always proportionately higher with late cut than with early cut forages. Such an economic loss has an important effect on livestock farm profits.

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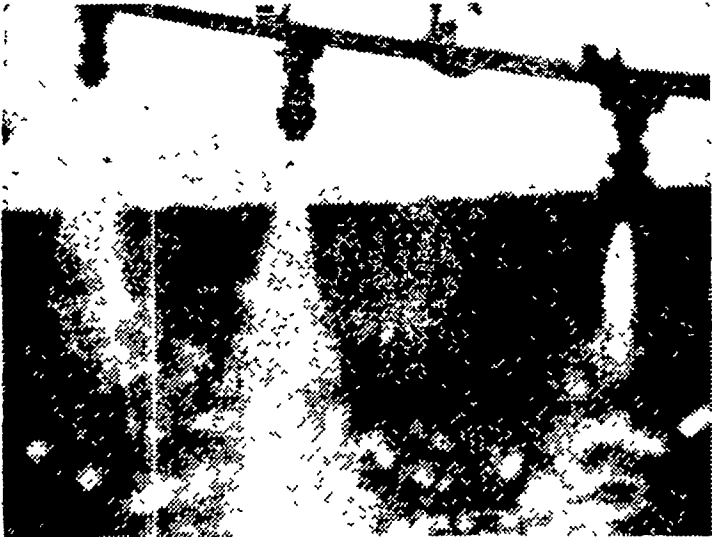
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