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Round Bales for Beef Cattle

Feeding round hay bales to beef cattle right in the field where the hay is grown is gaining in popularity among cattlemen in Pennsylvania, says Dr. Lowell L. Wilson, professor of animal science at The Pennsylvania State University.

Besides saving labor, hay inside round bales left in the field is just as good quality as hay in square bales stored in the barn, Dr. Wilson pointed out recently from studies at Penn State and elsewhere. The round bales form a tent, causing rain to run off rather than being absorbed into the bale.

The technique is worth considering for winter feeding of beef cattle, he suggested, as well as for dry weather feeding in summer and fall when pastures

may be poor.

"It is amazing how effectively the cows use the small round bales even with 12 inches or more of snow," he affirmed.

Small, round bales weighing 40 to 60 pounds have been used successfully for many years in several mid-western and mid-south states. Now several machines are available which produce round bales weighing anywhere from 1000 pounds to 3500 pounds. Other new machines make hay stacks weighing one to six tons.

Little or no labor is involved in making hay this way except for mowing, raking, and baling. There is no manure to haul during the fall or winter when the cows are grazing on grass or are eating the bales.

There is little if any labor in feeding round bales to beef cattle in the field. The cows go to the feed rather than the feed having to be taken to the cows. However, tractor attachments are available for moving large bales and stacks.

Before heavy snow occurs, the cows should be given access to fields where the bales are located. This allows the cows to graze the grass regrowth before it is covered by snow, Dr. Wilson explained.

Farmers are using two methods of grazing round bales and regrowth in the fields. A farmer with several such fields may simply turn the cows in with the bales and let them have access to all the bales at one time. Many beef cattle operators use and like this method.

A more efficient way is to allow the cows access to only what they need for a two or three week period at a time. By using electric fence, farmers divide fields into strips containing the round bales. Such a stripgrazing plan will increase the number of cow-days per acre by at least 35 per cent.

It is even more important, Dr. Wilson claimed, to limit-feed or stripgraze the large bales. In a Penn State study, cows had access to large round bales during September and October. This provided enough hay for one month. The cows used about 74 per cent of the available grass and round bales.

A study elsewhere found that the best hay feeding rack wasted 14 per cent of square-baled hay placed in the rack.

Beef cattle do the most thorough job of feeding from round bales if the water source is away from the hay field, Dr. Wilson and associates have found. Also, if cows stay in the

field all the time, there is a tendency for them to lie on the bales, thus reducing clean up of the hay.

The small 40 to 60 pound round bales seldom "crowd out" grass underneath the bales. In early spring, a growing pasture quickly re-establishes the small area under the round bales. However, bare spots will likely occur where large round bales and stacks are left in the field throughout the summer, fall, and winter.

Making hay into bales or stacks means that excess hay can not be sold through normal hay marketing channels, the Penn State animal scientist added.

Experiments with round bales and hay stacks are continuing at Penn State.

State Will Check Accuracy of Scales

Live weights of cattle, swine and sheep ready for slaughter in stockyards will be checked on up-to-date inspected scales, it was disclosed by Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Jim McHale.

McHale announced at the 58th Annual Conference of the Pennsylvania Weights and Measures Association that six heavy duty trucks will begin making rounds of stockyards October 1 to check on the accuracy of the scales used.

"With today's meat prices being what they are," said McHale, "it is doubly important that no one gets shortchanged on weights."

The secretary acknowledged that since the Bureau of Weights and Measures was brought under the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Department in March, "we have had more clout in the consumer protection field."

McHale said the new bureau complements the department's Bureau of Food and Chemistry which inspects foods sold at the retail level. "With our Weights and Measures inspectors," said McHale, "we can check the accuracy of net weight labeling."

McHale said, "We are all consumers and we can well understand that when we pay \$2 a pound for a cut of beef, the smallest weight discrepancy can mean a substantial loss to us in terms of a year's purchases."

The secretary also announced in his speech that the state will hold seminars for county weights and measures personnel in October, January and April.

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