

Foraging Around



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RELATIVE FEED VALUE

In my January column, I introduced the term Relative Feed Value (RFV). Briefly, it's a forage quality term -- an index that combines digestibility and intake of a forage. It's calculated from forage fiber analyses and it places the above values (digestibility and intake) in one number for a quick, easy, and effective method of evaluating quality of different forages (legumes and grasses, hays and hay crop silages) for maintenance and high performance animals rations.

Where did the term originate? It all started back in the early 70's. At that time, as President of the American Forage and Grassland Council, I appointed a National Hay Marketing Task Force. One of its goals was to find a realistic method of determining the price of hay by some realistic measure of its feed value. Two important findings resulted from that early effort: 1) the development of Near Infrared Reflectance Analysis (NIRS) as a realistic method of measuring feed value, and 2) the development of AFGC Hay Standards, and later the National Alfalfa Hay Quality Standards, based on analyses for dry matter, crude protein and acid detergent fiber, with RFV as the numerical index for comparing different forages.

So much for history. NIRS is now widely used throughout the world as a rapid, accurate method of evaluating quality in forages. And RFV, while relatively new, is currently used in many areas of the United States, and, incidentally, is used as the index of quality in New York's DHIC.

There's nothing magical about calculating an RFV value for a sample of forage -- if you have the necessary analyses of that forage. However, this value would normally be calculated for you by the laboratory doing the analysis or the person doing your feed programming -- if it's a part of that program.

It may surprise you that crude protein does not enter into the calculation for RFV. This in no way lessens the importance of crude protein as a measure of quality -- or its importance in feed programming. But it does emphasize the importance of fiber, both amount and quality, in ration balancing.

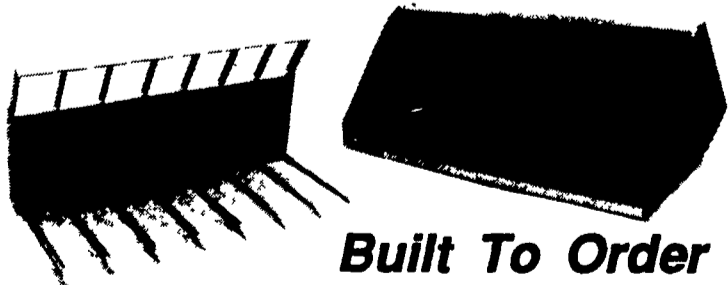
For the records below are the RFV's for the various grades of hay included in our national hay grades:

Hay Grade	RFV
Prime	Over 151
#1	125-151
#2	103-124
#3	87-102
#4	75-86
#5	Under 75

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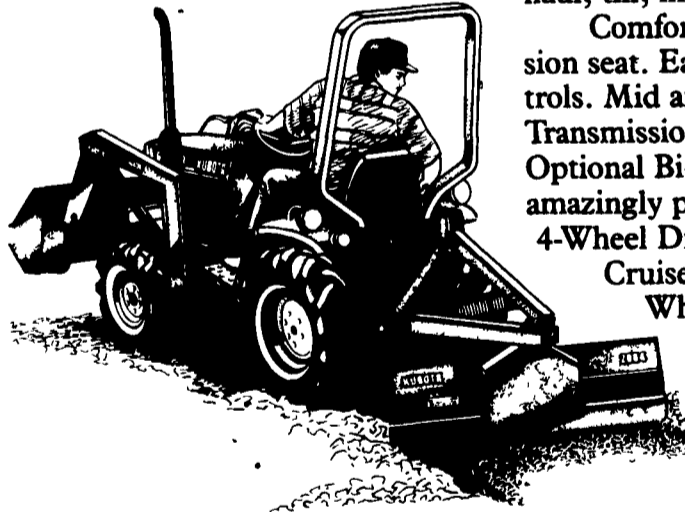
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