

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Purchasing Forage”*

We have been getting some much-needed moisture in our area lately, but that doesn't mean we aren't still facing drought conditions. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, approximately 20% of Kansas presently faces drought conditions, while 40% remains abnormally dry. As of August 15<sup>th</sup>, all of Greenwood County is in a D0 (Abnormally Dry) drought.

Many issues arise from this lack of rainfall that affects livestock producers. Our area was presented with early Spring moisture, but according to the KS Mesonet website, our rain total is 5.32 inches below normal rainfall over the past 365 days. As a result, producers that grow their own hay encounter forage fields that yield less than normal, which leaves them needing to buy more. In turn, leading producers to purchase hay from other parts of the state, or even other states in close proximity, to make sure they have enough feed resources for the upcoming winter.

With remote transactions and contactless payments becoming more common, it's important for producers to find ways to inspect forage before they purchase it, to ensure quality. There are several different aspects a person can evaluate by visiting the farm and looking at hay in person. One tip is to estimate the leaf-to-stem ratio. The higher quality hay will have more leaves with fewer stems and seed heads.

It's also a good practice to ask for sellers to supply a forage test to guarantee its nutritional value. This can give you an idea of the hay's crude protein percentage and fiber amount. You should also think about how it was stored, since the sample was taken for analysis. Additional moisture after that will affect the quality that you are going to actually get compared to the quality when that sample was acquired.

Ask the seller if it was covered or raised off of the ground, in order to figure out how much moisture a given bale was potentially absorbing in storage. Another factor to consider is buying hay on a tonnage basis instead of per bale. Your livestock eat pounds and not volume. Having a total weight in tons gives a producer the ability to better calculate how much is needed and if enough is being purchased. When bales are not wrapped to the same density, their sizes and weight can vary greatly.

Information comes from K-State beef cattle nutritionist Phillip Lancaster.