

Rich County Extension

Hay Testing: A Simple Management Tool

Reganne Briggs, Extension Assistant Professor

This time of year, I start to get calls from producers asking me to test their hay. Testing hay is a great tool, however often times producers overlook testing the quality of their hay. Not knowing the quality of forage can act as a two-edged sword according to Penn State Extension. A producer that has not tested the quality of their hay may overestimate or even underestimate the nutrient quality of their hay. If a producer overestimates the quality of their hay, they could lose profits by not meeting all the nutrient requirements of their livestock. Cattle that do not have all requirements met will not perform to their genetic potential, it's as simple as that. On the flip side, ranchers that underestimate the quality of their hay may be wasting money on expensive supplements that the animal actually isn't using. Excess protein is usually excreted by the animal, and excess energy is simply stored as fat until the animal needs it. Protein and energy are very important requirements to meet when dealing with livestock, and sometimes producers want to test hay for minerals as well.

What's In This Month's Issue:

- Hay Testing: A Simple Management Tool
- Upcoming and Past Events



Many biological processes within the animal require minerals, and this is why they are so important. Usually in the Intermountain West, selenium, zinc, copper, and manganese (not to be confused with magnesium) are low. However, testing hay may not be the most reliable source of assessing mineral status. When hay is stored for a long period of time, minerals and vitamins can be leached out of the hay from water and can be damaged from sunlight. The most reliable way to test mineral status of animals is liver biopsies. However, this process can be expensive. Unless there is a risk of toxicity for specific minerals, general mineral supplements can be supplemented at all times.



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Hay Testing: A Simple Management Tool: Cont.

Hay testing is a useful tool, and it can give producers a lot of useful information. When analysis reports are received, producers can use simple math along with nutrient requirement tables to determine if the hay is meeting the needs of their cattle. Another option is ration balancing programs. When I get the test results back, I plug the numbers into my ration balancing program with any supplements the producer is using to make sure all nutrient requirements are met. Testing hay is a management tool for producers. It is an inexpensive way to increase economic returns somewhere in the production cycle.

If you have questions, please contact me!

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Upcoming and Past Events

Winter Workshops

When: TBA

Watch for upcoming workshops on livestock production, succession planning, and more!



Drought Outlook and Mitigation Strategies Workshop

for Livestock Producers

Rich County Senior Center

May 19th, 2022, at 6:00 pm

Dinner will be provided.

Topics Include:

Market Outlook and Drought - Dr. Ryan Larsen

Herd Management During Drought - Dr. Matt Garcia

Pasture/Range Management During Drought - Dr. Eric Thacker

For more information, please contact:
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Drought Outlook and Mitigation Strategies Workshop

May 19th, 2022

Last month USU Extension Specialists presented at a drought workshop.

Follow this link to view the recording.

Click [HERE](#) for recording.

for more visit: <https://extension.usu.edu/rich/>