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Beating the Weather with a Bale Wrapper

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Just like many things in life getting the first cutting of hay made in the spring of the year is many times easier said than done. Given the excellent growing conditions for cool-season grass, the potential exists for very high yields of quality forage early in the growing season. There is, however, a problem. The same weather conditions that are conducive to forage growth are often condemned because of the difficulty posed in getting the first cutting of hay made in a timely manner. There is some hope to manage around this potential hang up.

Having the ability to make wrapped hay (balage), allows one to better manage the weather factor. In this type of haying operation, the window needed to make quality winter-feed is greatly reduced. Instead of the typical 3 to 6 days needed to make dry hay, the window of opportunity can be as little as 6 hours if conditions are right.

More often than not, 24 hours of drying time are needed to get moisture levels (40-60%) of the forage in the correct range. With this in mind it is easy to see how the weather can be managed in this type of operation. Producers now have the opportunity to get the first cutting of hay made at the proper stage of plant maturity instead of when Mother Nature says that it is time to make hay.

Balage also offers some other advantages to a haying operation. As mentioned the potential exists for higher quality forage due to a more timely harvest. Another way forage quality can be increased is by reducing less leaf loss in legumes by baling at higher moistures. Storage losses are all but eliminated because each bale is protected from the weather. There are also fewer trips to make across a field because tedding and raking are not necessarily needed in this type of operation.

There are a few trade-offs, however. More bales have to be made and handled. Due to the higher moisture content of balage, the bales weigh much more than the same size dry bale. Disposing of the plastic can be a potential problem in

some operations. Lastly, balage really should be fed within a year of harvest because the plastic will break down and the bales will begin to spoil.

Making balage is not necessarily the answer to all the early season haying problems, however it does offer a sensible and economical solution to the weather problem that all hay producers face.

Why Make Baleage?

1. More timely hay harvest.
2. Potential for higher quality feed.
3. Less storage loss.
4. Less equipment to own and maintain as compared to conventional silage methods.
5. Less leaf loss during harvest as compared to dry hay baling.
6. Lower purchased feed costs due to higher feed value in baleage.
7. Fewer trips across the field. (no raking or tedding)

Note: Making baleage does not increase the value of the hay if it is poor in the first place. Remember---Garbage in Garbage out!!!!

Trade-offs

8. More bales to make. (bales must be smaller for handling purposes)
9. Disposal of plastic after feeding
10. Baleage should be fed within a year of making.

Baling considerations

11. Would like to bale at 50-60% moisture. (acceptable range 35-65% moisture)
12. Need to use plastic or untreated sisal twine.
13. Generally the crop needs to wilt 6 to 24 hours depending on type of crop and weather.
14. Bales should be wrapped as soon as possible after baling. Ideally within 4 hours.
15. Would like 6 to 8 layers of wrap to assure no oxygen is getting into the bale.

16. Should make bales as dense as possible to eliminate excess oxygen in the bale.