Rainfall has Affected Hay and Hay-Crop Silage Harvest

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Abstract
Hay is an agricultural product that varies greatly in nutritional quality. The ‘hay market’ frequently uses descriptive terms like 'dairy quality,' 'beef-cow quality' or more quantitative terms like 'premium,' 'good', and 'fair'; which have some forage testing guidelines to place hay lots in these categories. For hay, alfalfa- or grass-dominant, to be good enough to be marketed as 'dairy quality' or 'premium,' it has to be harvested at a growth stage where the plant is composed of a high leaf proportion and less fibrous stems. Forage harvested and stored as hay-crop silage can be placed into the same general nutritional categories.

Keywords
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Disciplines
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Rainfall has Affected Hay and Hay-Crop Silage Harvest

June 10, 2008

By Stephen K. Barnhart, Department of Agronomy

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For hay, alfalfa- or grass-dominant, to be good enough to be marketed as 'dairy quality' or 'premium,' it has to be harvested at a growth stage where the plant is composed of a high leaf proportion and less fibrous stems. Forage harvested and stored as hay-crop silage can be placed into the same general nutritional categories.
Producers in the Midwest have seen rain and flooding prevent them from cutting their first hay or silage harvest of the season at an early maturity stage, so very little ‘dairy’ quality’ or ‘premium’ hay or silage has been stored.

The June 2, Iowa Crop and Weather newsletter from the USDA-National Agricultural Statistical Service provides the first indication of ‘first cut’ hay and forage harvest in Iowa. The report says that in a ‘normal’ year, Iowa producers would have harvested about 32 percent of intended first cutting hay by June1.

Statewide this year, only 8 percent of the first cutting of forage has been cut and stored. The northeast and east central crop reporting areas of the state are only slightly ahead of the state average at 15 percent.

Any first cut hay or silage harvested after June 1 will be more mature and will not have the nutritional characteristics to be classified as ‘dairy quality’ or ‘premium.’ Since forage crops can be harvested three, four or even five times per year, there is still a good opportunity for Iowa producers to harvest higher quality hay later in the growing season to make up some or all of the deficit.

A feed supply problem still exists, however, on many dairy farms in the state that depend on a ‘normal’ first cutting. We are at the end of the 2007-2008 ‘winter marketing season’ so there are limited supplies of ‘old crop hay’ still available, but at ‘top price’ for those who need high quality hay for their livestock.

States to the west, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas, have had a better opportunity for producing ‘dairy quality’ hay this season, so producers can find some ‘new crop’ hay coming into Iowa hay auctions, and can locate hay on www-based ‘hay net’ and ‘hay list’ sites. The prices for ‘dairy quality’ or ‘premium’ hay are similar to winter prices, until a firmer picture of regional hay availability comes. A few Web-based hay marketing sites are listed in the column to the right.

**State & Federal Hay Directories:**

**USDA-FSA HayNet**

**Iowa Hay and Straw Directory**

**Upper Midwest Haylist**

**Wisconsin**

**Missouri**

**Nebraska**

**Commercial Hay Directories:**