



Storing Hay - Are You Losing Out?

By Jackie Nix

Storing round bales outside is convenient and appears to be cheap. However, appearances can be deceptive. If your current method of hay storage is allowing several inches of a bale to rot, you might be surprised at how much hay is being wasted. The outer 4 to 6 inches, where most of the losses occur, make up a large percentage of the bale as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage of Bale in Outer Inches

Bale Diameter	Percentage of Bale in	
	Outer 4"	Outer 6"
4 ft.	31%	45%
5 ft.	25%	36%
6 ft.	21%	30%

Table 2. Hay Losses for Storage Methods

Storage Method	Percent Loss
Outside on Ground	35%
Outside Covered	29%
Outside Off-Ground	28%
Hay Tarp	12%
Inside Barn	6%

Amount of loss depends on several factors including storage method, length of storage, rainfall, bale density and size. Changing the method of storage is the most practical way for a producer to decrease hay loss. Table 2 gives average losses for different storage methods.

The amount of money that can be saved by improving hay storage depends on two things: 1) The amount of hay saved and 2) the value of the hay. To calculate money saved by a change in storage method, estimate the difference in hay loss between your current method and the new method. Multiply this difference by the value of the hay to give gross savings. The following examples compare changing from storing outside on the ground to under a hay tarp.

Current losses (35%) - Expected losses (12%) = Expected savings (23%)

Expected Savings (23%) x Per bale value (\$20) = Gross savings per bale (\$4.60)

The amount of money spent to protect hay must be less than the potential savings to be cost effective. Consider a 28' X 54' tarp that will cover 54 (5'X4') bales. A \$4.60 per bale savings times 54 bales gives a savings value of \$248.40 per year that can be applied to paying for the tarp. This tarp reduces hay spoilage by an equivalent of 12 bales annually.

Hay tarps are an attractive option for many producers because of low initial cost. They are especially popular for hay storage on rented land. Tarps come in many different sizes. Bales size and stacking method will determine tarp size needed and how many bales will fit under one tarp. Hay tarp prices range from \$150 to \$300 and tend to last from 1 to 5 years. Even if resources do not permit the use of a tarp, several changes can still be made to reduce storage losses outside.

- Select a well drained area
- Get bales off the ground by using rock, poles, tires or pallets
- Do not store under trees
- Tightly place bales end to end in a north-south row
- Leave at least 3 ft between rows
- Use individual bale wraps or bonnets

In summary, proper hay storage will reduce overall losses and reduce your feeding costs over the winter. Sweetlix offers a complete line of economical protein and mineral/vitamin products ideal for supplementing winter hay supplies for all types of livestock. For more information about these products and how they can fit into your current management system, contact you local Sweetlix representative or call 1-877-SWEETLIX.

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