

Cost-Share Dollars Available for Forage Testing

HUNTER NICKELL – LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION AGENT

To help producers make informed feeding decisions, K-State Extension – Southwind District has been awarded funding through the Bill House Ag Grant from the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas. Through this grant, we are offering a \$20 cost-share on full nutrient forage analysis tests to producers of the Southwind District. A typical total nutrient analysis test costs \$22 plus shipping, while a full nutrient analysis plus nitrate test costs \$35 plus shipping. The program is available on a first-come, first-served basis and is limited to 100 total samples. Producers may receive cost-share assistance on up to two forage samples.

Though the feeding season is a few months away, we are beginning to start the summer haying season. As producers bale hay, many of them are beginning to evaluate hay inventories and maybe even plan winter supplementation. One of the most overlooked management tools is also among the most economical: forage testing.

A common assumption is that all hay is relatively similar, especially when it looks good from the outside. Unfortunately, appearances can be deceiving. Two hay bales harvested from neighboring fields can vary significantly in protein, energy, digestibility, and even nitrate content. Without knowing the nutritional value of your forage, developing an effective feeding program becomes little more than an educated guess.

This year, forage testing may be more important than ever. Across southeast Kansas, weather conditions and harvest timing have created significant differences in forage quality. Hay baling has been significantly delayed due to rain or other environmental factors, such as flooding. As a result, nutrient values ARE going to vary widely this year, especially on cool-season forages still not harvested in June.

Knowing the quality of your forage can provide several benefits:

- Stretch feed dollars by matching supplements to actual forage needs.
- Avoid overfeeding expensive protein and energy supplements.
- Identify lower-quality hay that should be fed to cows with lower nutrient requirements.
- Reduce the risk of nutritional deficiencies that can affect reproduction, body condition, and calf performance.
- Detect potential issues such as nitrate accumulation or other feed quality concerns.

For many operations, the cost of a forage test can be recovered quickly through more precise supplementation decisions. Feeding even one pound of unnecessary supplement per cow per day can add up to substantial costs over the course of a winter-feeding season.

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A full nutrient analysis provides valuable information, including crude protein, total digestible nutrients (TDN), fiber levels, energy, and other important nutritional measurements that can be used to balance rations more effectively.

Collecting a representative sample is critical. Producers are encouraged to use a hay probe and sample multiple bales from each lot of hay. Samples can then be submitted through the Extension office for laboratory analysis.

The information gained from a forage test allows producers to make data-driven feeding decisions rather than relying on visual estimates or assumptions. In a time when feed costs remain one of the largest expenses in an operation, understanding the quality of your forage can be one of the best investments you make.

For more information about the forage testing cost-share program or assistance with collecting samples, contact Hunter Nickell, Livestock Production Agent at any K-State Extension – Southwind District office or by email nickell99@ksu.edu.



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