

## Hay Shortage: Coping Tips for Livestock Owners

**2007 drought caused hay shortage, challenging farmers to find feed for their farm animals. Read some tips and get connected to more information.**

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Coping with this year's drought means coping with a hay shortage. You may wish to consider using alternative feeds and other strategies.

Be sure your research is thorough before you begin an alternative feeding program. (Contact your veterinarian and/or cooperative extension agent for advice.)

Some feed options to consider during a hay shortage are listed below. (Sources: livestock specialists from Mississippi State, Perdue, North Dakota and Ohio State universities.)

### Feed Grain

Mixing hay with feed grain and supplements can help stretch your supply of hay.

It's important to use proper proportions of each. OSU researcher Steve Loerch suggests feeding cattle "a late-fall diet of 2 pounds hay, 2 pounds supplement and 12 pounds whole-shelled corn. He increased the corn to 14 pounds between January and spring turnout, keeping the other parts the same." Pregnant and lactating beef cows require specialized portions.

Be sure to consider supplements such as vitamin A and calcium, which are lacking in feed grain.

Tip: During feeding, sort animals according to nutritional needs, allowing fair chance to eat.

### Soybean Hulls

Containing high fiber and energy values, soybean hulls may also enhance animals' forage use, suggest OSU livestock specialists.

One study showed that feeding 4 pounds of soyhulls from December through March saved about 625 pounds of hay per cow. Cow weight loss was only 13 pounds on soyhulls compared to 86 pounds on forage.

Tip: Soyhulls--whole or ground--are lightweight, so caution is needed when handling the feed in livestock buildings or in windy conditions.

### Corn Gluten Feed

Corn gluten feed, not to be confused with corn gluten meal, is another high-fiber, high-energy feed substitute suggested to help cope with the hay shortage.

Ask your vet about the correct calcium supplement when using corn gluten feed. Nutrient levels in corn gluten feed can vary; testing the nutrient values is recommended.

Tip: The wet form of corn gluten feed has some nutritional benefits over the dry form, but the latter is easier to handle. Wet corn gluten feed has a warm-weather bunk life of several days compared to two weeks in cold weather. Also, corn gluten feed does not appear to depress forage (fiber) digestibility compared to corn grain which can depress digestibility.

### More Feed Choices

Supplements or alternatives to help cope with the hay shortage include: soybean hull pellets, dehydrated alfalfa pellets, complete feed or hay cubes.

Preston Buff, Mississippi University Cooperative Extension equine specialist, says, "Hay cubes are processed hay, generally alfalfa or an alfalfa and grass mix, which are sold in bags at feed stores," he said. "They are a good-quality option, but they will be more expensive than hay."

Conservation, Culling and Hay Shortage Resources

Stockpiling helps and, if all else fails, read about how to make a tough culling decision

Jane Parish, beef cattle specialist with Mississippi State University's Extension Service, offers several suggestions to ensure cattle are in good-enough condition for spring breeding.

Conserve or stockpile

by allowing cattle and horses to graze forages, such as tall fescue or grasses, through the fall until small grains and annual ryegrass crops become available.

Cull your animals if absolutely necessary

Parish offers the following guidelines: Group animals into age groups and Assess their marketability. Consider culling those that are: non-pregnant poor performers or that exhibit bad temperaments.

This will conserve hay for top performers in the operation, according to Parish.

Tip: Stick with a set calving period to help manage your nutritional program, your marketing plans and health programs.

Links to Sources:

North Dakota State University University Extension: Ranch Management During Drought

Mississippi State University Extension:

- Hay shortage impacts producers' decisions

- Savvy producers can survive hay shortage

Ohio State and Purdue University Extension:

Feed Substitutes Can Help Fight Hay Shortage