

Does Hay Feeding Method Effect Cow Performance, Hay Waste and Wintering Cost?^a

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Abstract A conventional method of rolling round bales out on the ground was compared to either shredding round hay bales on the ground with a bale processor or feeding hay in a tapered-cone round bale feeder. The cows used in the study were in the third trimester of pregnancy and were fed for an average of 59 days during the test period. Data recorded from the three-year study was then used to prepare an economic analysis model with operating budgets for 100 and 300 head reference herds.

Feeding bales in a tapered-cone round bale feeder increased cow weight gain ($P < 0.01$), resulted in greater positive rib fat depth change ($P = 0.06$), reduced estimated hay consumption an average 10.2% compared to rolling bales out on the ground or using a bale processor to shred hay on the ground ($P < 0.01$), and reduced hay waste in the two years of the study when alfalfa-grass hay was fed, but not when oat hay was fed. Overall, for the three year evaluation period, using the tapered-cone bale feeder reduced wintering cost by 21.0% for a 100-cow reference herd and 17.6% for a 300-cow reference herd compared to feeding with a bale processor.

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