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BeefTalk: Hay Harvest Time Sets Scene To Calculate Winter Feed Needs

By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist, NDSU Extension Service

Now is the time to make sure there is enough feed available for next April and May. Look around and you'll see mowers, rakes and balers in hot pursuit of next winter's hay supply -- the No. 1 expense for cow calf producers.

Hay is a commodity that producers use as a measure of their comfort zone while they are keeping a close eye on the weather predictions. At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, it is no different. Our annual feed inventory report indicates we are on the short side. (We do our inventory on July 1 since that is the beginning of the Center's fiscal year.)

Currently, we have 55.5 tons of hay, 102.4 tons of straw and 79 tons of grain. That's well below the necessary comfort zone. Hay is the most common ingredient in beef operations so I would like to focus on the total hay figure, which is less than 5 percent of our annual need.

On Jan. 1, the center had 798 tons of hay. The six month hay inventory disappearance for the winter of 2001 was 1,072 tons of hay. (Note: 743 tons of inventory change and 329 tons of hay purchased and fed out between the two inventory dates.) On Jan. 1, 2000, the center had 1,485 tons of hay, and on July 1, 2000, the center had 460 tons left as carryover. The total hay inventory disappearance was 1,025 tons for the winter of 2000.

The obvious conclusion is that the Center was short hay coming into the past winter. Comparing the Jan. 1, 2001 inventory against the Jan. 1, 2000 inventory, the center was short 687 tons of hay and went into the winter without a hay inventory that could be expected to meet needs.

If my memory is correct, the fall of 1999 was great, with little snow. The fall of 2000 was tough, with more winter-like weather that required us to pull cows into winter feeding grounds early. The winter was long but not extremely cold. In response to the shortfall in hay inventory on Jan. 1, 2001, the center purchased 329 tons of hay midway through the 2001 winter feeding season.

The total inventory requiring feed for the winter of 1999-2000 was 558 head of cattle and horses. In the winter of 2000-2001, 539 head of cattle and horses were fed..

The bottom line to all this history and numbers? The center currently has

only 55.5 tons of hay in inventory and projects to feed 400 bred cows, 120 replacement heifers, 26 bulls and 39 horses for a total of 585 head of cattle and horses for 2002.

As I noted earlier, the mowers better keep running because we are short on feed and long on livestock numbers.

Given past data, the minimum hay needed to meet a four month feeding season would be approximately 1,170 tons. If the weather turns against us and the standing stubble and corn can't be grazed, we may have a six-month feeding period requiring 1,755 tons of hay.

How much feed does our land base produce? The Center has 323 acres for annual forage production (2.3 tons per acre), 296 acres of Alfalfa (1.5 tons per acre), 521 acres of tame hay (1 ton per acre) and 13 acres of ditch hay (1 ton per acre) for about 1,153 acres with a total projected yield of about 1,720 tons of forage.

It looks like we are close to meeting our needs, given a reasonable hay season. If the weatherman projects, I better buy some hay.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.COM on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0047.

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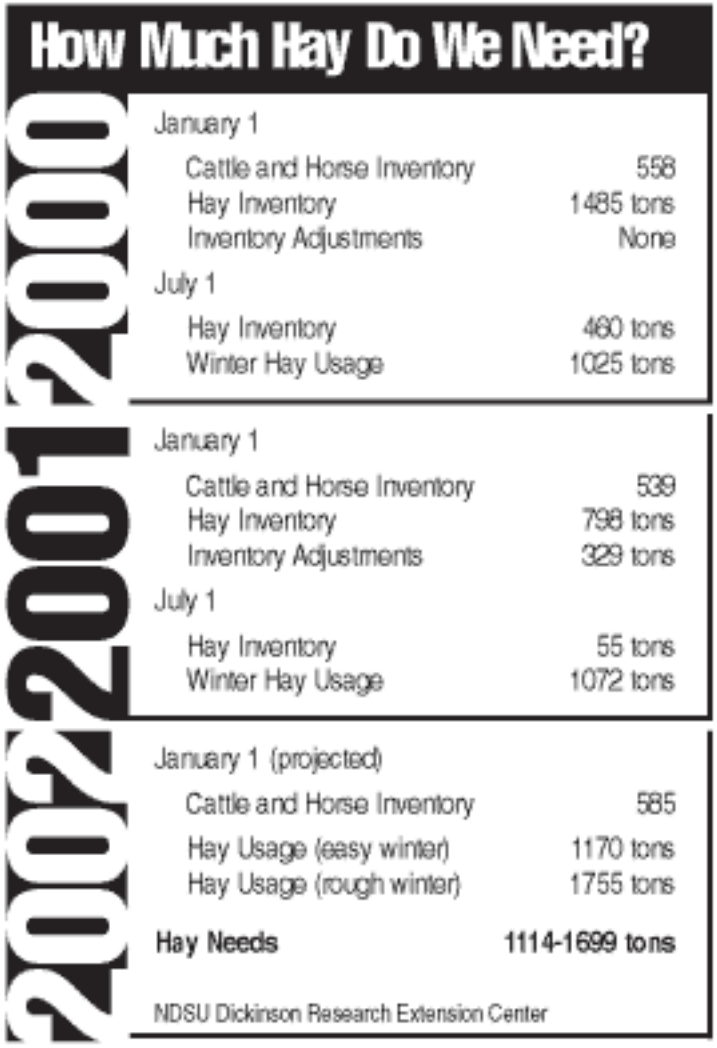

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