



BeefTalk: Now That Hurts!

There is no fairy godmother that will wave a wand to feed the cows.

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The hay yard is empty for many producers and the traditional June hay was scarce or nonexistent. As the staple for cattle, the amount of hay one wanted to make has been replaced with the amount of hay needed to sustain the herd.



Early indications suggest an upward shift in prices. Last year's hay was abundant and visible from the road, at least in the case of the Dickinson Research Extension Center.

A quick check of the records confirmed that the center purchased 318 tons of hay at an average price of \$61.65 per ton. That will change this year.

The “Ringwall” approach to hay inventory figures says one large, round bale per cow per month for every cow one is planning on feeding. Nutritionists want to know the bale weight and have a quality analysis.

Veterinarians note the need for nitrate testing and monitoring any other health concerns with poorly prepared hay. For a generic starting point, it works. Generally, the bales come in pretty heavy and there seems to be enough extra weight on the bales to make sure there is some hay for the calves, bulls and a few horses.

If we try to maintain 350 cows at the center through the anticipated November-to-April feeding period, we need 2,100 bales. For a large part of the upper Midwest, these dates coincide with the period when forage does not grow.

Last year, the center supplemented raised feed with approximately 500 purchased bales that weighed 1,300 pounds. This year, the tables are turned and the center only is anticipating putting up approximately 400 bales. This means there is a need to purchase 1,700 bales.

Current price puts the value of much of the hay at approximately \$90 to \$100 per ton. Through verbal discussions, the price range is somewhere between \$60 and \$150 per ton.

The alfalfa market for dairy cow hay would be significantly higher and the later cut grass hay should be available near the lower end of the price range. So stop right there, take a deep breath and mutter, “now that hurts.”

Many times, changes tend to arrive in different packages for the typical needs versus wants list. However, the bottom line is that it makes no difference. The impact is the same.

Placing wants ahead of needs can put an operation in financial jeopardy. Likewise, as the wants turn up on the needs list, the financial impact is just as devastating.

Last year, our hay purchases here at the center were almost \$20,000. This year, those 1,700 bales are estimated to total \$110,500. Let me repeat my statement. “Now that hurts!”

That means 1,105 tons at \$100 per ton for a total cost of \$110,500. Even worse, we haven't paid any trucking fee yet. “Now that hurts even more!”

There is no fairy godmother that will wave a wand to feed the cows. Only money and a lot of hard labor will do that. There might be a fairy godmother for the winter weather and maybe she will shorten the winter feeding period, but I never have found her very dependable.

If one was to be honest, the tooth fairy is more dependable, but usually quits by the time one is actively involved in the beef business.

Adding up the per cow purchased hay cost, the center spent around \$60 a cow last year. This year, it looks like the center may need to budget more than \$300 per cow for hay. "Oh, that hurts!"

Even if the tooth fairy would help, she simply doesn't deal with that kind of money. However, we do need to take a time out to see if any money was saved by not putting up our own hay.

More next time. I need to go buy some tissues.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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Attachments



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(bt081408.pdf - 22.17 Kb)



EPS - Now That Hurts! Hay costs per cow
(bt081408.eps - 232.35 Kb)