2012 Southeast Hay Contest Results

A Cooperative Extension Effort of
Auburn University, Clemson University, The University of Florida,
and The University of Georgia

Final results for the 2012 Southeastern Hay Contest (SEHC) are listed in Table 1. The results are broken down into the six categories of the contest: warm season perennial grass hay (bermudagrass, bahiagrass), perennial peanut and alfalfa hay, perennial cool season grass (tall fescue, orchardgrass, etc.), mixed and annual grass hay, grass baleage, and legume baleage categories. This contest is held in conjunction with the Sunbelt Agricultural Expo in Moultrie, GA.

Once again, Southeastern hay producers had to deal with severe drought conditions. Fortunately, the summer rains allowed for a reasonable recovery in many areas and many producers ended the year with much better hay supplies than in previous years. We received 150 entries to the SEHC from all across the region in 2012 (24% increase over last year). The substantial increase in entries is largely a reflection of the severity of the growing conditions in 2011 and the recovery that we had in the later part of this season.

This year's contest resulted in two records! For the first time, we have had one farm family place in the Top 3 in three different categories. It is the SE Hay Contest's Triple Crown! The other record is for the highest RFQ scoring forage crop ever submitted to the SE Hay Contest! In fact, we had three entries from the same farm that scored the highest ever. The RFQ score was so high on these entries that the values were considered outside the calibration of the machine, as any RFQ scoring greater than 300 is considered out of range.

What is Relative Forage Quality? In the past, hay quality prediction equations were based on the fiber *concentration* of the hay crop. However, forage crops can have similar fiber content yet have very different digestibility. For instance, Tifton 85 bermudagrass often has a higher fiber concentration than other bermudagrass varieties, yet it is more digestible. This improved digestibility results in enhanced animal performance, but is not reflected using traditional forage testing methods. The Relative Forage Quality index was developed by the University of Florida and the University of Wisconsin to predict the fiber *digestibility* and animal intake of harvested crops. Since 2003, hundreds of warm season samples have been used to refine the RFQ equation for bermudagrass and other warm season forages. Currently, all forage sample results from the UGA Feed and Forage Testing Lab in Athens contain an estimate of Relative Forage Quality. This value is a single, easy to interpret number that improves producer understanding of a forage's nutritive quality and helps in establishing a fair market value for the product.

How can Relative Forage Quality help me? Relative Forage Quality allows hay producers to easily categorize and price hay lots based on relative quality. Producers can purchase hay lots depending on its end use. For example, there is little need to feed high-quality hay to livestock that could easily utilize poorer quality forage. Hay with a RFQ of 115-130 can be fed to maintain beef cow-calf pairs, hay with an RFQ of 125-150 is adequate for stocker cattle or young growing replacement heifers, and hay with an RFQ of 140-160 is suitable for dairy cattle in the first three months of lactation. It is also easy to see that Relative Forage Quality could provide the framework for a quality hay marketing system. For example, hay with a RFQ of 155 could conceptually be labeled "premium" hay, while hay with an RFQ of 105 could be labeled "fair". This simple system could allow producers to price hay consistently and fairly across harvest maturity, fertilization regimes, or plant species (i.e. bermudagrass, bahiagrass, perennial peanut, or tall fescue).

Table 1. Category winners from the 2012 Southeastern Hay Contest. (150 Sample Entries)

Category	Farm	Crude Protein, %	TDN,%	RFQ
Warm Season Per. Grass Hay	**Duncan Legacy Farm**	**17.54**	**61.48**	**144.4**
68 Entries	Carroll County, GA			
	Glen Poole	**11.97**	**57.40**	**122.9**
	Salley, SC			
	Teri Crosby	**13.58**	**57.11**	**122.7**
	Johnson County, GA			
			Category Average	***95.9***
Per. Peanut/Alfalfa Hay	**Geralds Farms**	**27.49**	**70.44**	**234.0**
14 Entries	Hart County, KY			
	Vickers Still Farm	**24.79**	**70.81**	**224.8**
	Coffee County, GA			
	Duncan Legacy Farm	**27.49**	**69.96**	**224.0**
	Carroll County, GA			
			Category Average	***183.5***
Cool Season Per. Grass Hay	**Duncan Legacy Farm**	**21.9**	**64.3**	**160.1**
7 Entries	Carroll County, GA			
	Duncan Legacy Farm	**21.9**	**62.7**	**151.3**
	Carroll County, GA			
	Charles Woodward	**11.6**	**58.2**	**124.8**
	Newton County, GA			
			Category Average	***117.6***
Mixed and Annual Grass Hay	**Wes Smith**	**17.7**	**62.7**	**145.2**
47 Entries	Upson County, GA			
	Dave Garwood	**11.8**	**62.0**	**142.3**
	Jasper County, GA			
	Joe Armstrong	**12.8**	**61.6**	**139.7**
	Grady County, GA			
			Category Average	***111.3***
Grass Baleage	**Rolling Rock Farms**	**16.5**	**68.3**	**181.3**
3 Entries	Oglethorpe County, GA			
	Coggins Farms	**15.2**	**57.2**	**114.0**
	Echols County, GA			
			Category Average	***143.0***
Legume Baleage	**Country Boy Farms**	**36.4**	**81.2**	**>300***
11 Entries	Edgefield, SC			
	Country Boy Farms	**33.3**	**77.6**	**>300***
	Edgefield, SC			
	Country Boy Farms	**31.0**	**74.2**	**>300***
	Edgefield, SC			
			Category Average	***203.9***

Think you can do better? Submit your sample in 2013 through your local county Extension office. An official entry form and the contest guidelines for next year's contest will be posted soon at www.georgiaforages.com.