

2008 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 2008 Southeastern Hay Contest 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.

Despite another drought-stressed growing season across the entire Southeast, 195 entries were received in 2008. Samples came from in from all across the Southeast and the overall average Relative Forage Quality (RFQ) was just over 118.

What is Relative Forage Quality? 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 is more digestible. This improved digestibility results in enhanced animal performance, but is not reflected using traditional hay testing methods. The Relative Forage Quality index was developed by the University of Wisconsin to predict the fiber *digestibility* and animal intake of harvested crops. Unfortunately, these equations were not applicable to warm season forages like bermudagrass, bahiagrass or perennial peanut. Since 2003, hundreds of warm season samples have been used to develop an 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 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. Cattle producers can purchase hay lots depending on its end use. For example, there is little need to feed high-end 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).

Think you can do better? Submit your sample in the summer of 2009 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.

Table 1. Category winners from the 2008 Southeastern Hay Contest. (195 Total Samples Entered)

Category	Farm	Crude Protein, %	TDN, %	RFQ
Warm Season Perennial Grass Hay	<i>Overall Range:</i>	<i>(6.2 - 20.6)</i>	<i>(40.9 - 66.3)</i>	<i>(70 - 144)</i>
	Yance Farms Inc. Houston Co., AL	16.3	64.6	144
	Gill-Starr Farm Anderson Co., SC	13.2	59.0	138
	Lightning's Hay Farms Grady Co., GA	15.5	62.6	131
Perennial Peanut/Alfalfa Hay	<i>Overall Range:</i>	<i>(11.3 - 27.9)</i>	<i>(56 - 73.3)</i>	<i>(103 - 228)</i>
	David Harden Walker Co., GA	26.0	73.3	225
	McCollum Farms Coffee Co., GA	23.2	71.6	215
	Vickers Still Farm Coffee Co., GA	22.9	69.5	191
Cool Season Perennial Grass Hay	<i>Overall Range:</i>	<i>(9.1 - 16.6)</i>	<i>(46.6 - 68.1)</i>	<i>(90 - 163)</i>
	Mitch Whitfield Banks Co., GA	16.6	68.1	163
	James Burton Walker Co., GA	15.6	55.5	122
	John Watson Walker Co., GA	12.4	55.4	115
Mixed, Annual Grass, or Other Hay	<i>Overall Range:</i>	<i>(5.6 - 19.4)</i>	<i>(42.5 - 66.0)</i>	<i>(78 - 178)</i>
	Little Joe Reams Madison Co., FL	16.0	66.0	178
	Trice Farm Upson Co., GA	11.3	60.5	162
	Lightning's Hay Farms Grady Co., GA	10.1	59.2	157
Grass Baleage	<i>Overall Range:</i>	<i>(7.7 - 17.4)</i>	<i>(40.5 - 61.0)</i>	<i>(70 - 164)</i>
	Hidden Valley Farms Oconee Co., SC	10.4	61.0	164
	Troy Platt Madison Co., FL	17.4	60.0	155
	Leavelle Farms Tuscaloosa Co., AL	8.5	57.3	153
Legume Baleage	<i>Overall Range:</i>	<i>(11.8 - 12.9)</i>	<i>(55.6 - 58.2)</i>	<i>(122 - 144)</i>
	Troy Platt Madison Co., FL	12.5	58.2	144
	Troy Platt Madison Co., FL	12.9	57.7	132
	Troy Platt Madison Co., FL	11.8	55.6	122