

2011 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 2011 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, we were severely impacted by adverse weather conditions throughout the Southeast this year. We received 121 entries to the SEHC from all across the region in 2011 (42% less than last year). The substantial decline in entries is largely a reflection of the severity of the growing conditions in 2011. Just about every month during the summer of 2011 was at or near the record for heat and drought in the 117-year history of weather data. Many areas set records for the number of days with 90°+ temperatures, and nighttime temperatures frequently brought no respite. Other factors (e.g., significant decreases in hay acreage, the elimination of a substantial number of local Extension Agent positions, and the closing of some Extension offices in the southeastern states) also contributed to the substantial decline in SEHC entries.

High temperatures and, especially, hot and humid nights can severely reduce forage quality (and quantity). These factors likely combined to suppress forage quality in 2011 in a manner similar to that observed in 2010. In fact, the average RFQ score of the test was just under 104, which is only slightly better than 2011.

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 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 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 2011 Southeastern Hay Contest. (121 Sample Entries)

Category	Farm	Crude Protein, %	TDN,%	RFQ
Warm Season Per. Grass Hay <i>70 Entries</i>	L.C. Strange Farm Emanuel County, GA	19.5	61.7	142.0
	Dene Channell Greene County, GA	11.6	59.6	136.4
	Chris Peavy Washington County, GA	15.3	63.7	133.7
Per. Peanut/Alfalfa Hay <i>13 Entries</i>	Vickers Still Farm Coffee County, GA	24.5	68.8	200.6
	Vickers Still Farm Coffee County, GA	23.6	66.6	196.1
	Geralds Farms Hart County, KY	24.5	69.2	195.0
Cool Season Per. Grass Hay <i>3 Entries</i>	Duncan Legacy Farm Carroll County, GA	13.7	56.8	125.7
	McDonald Farm/Woodward Newton County, GA	9.4	54.9	100.3
	Trice Farm Upson County, GA	12.1	53.4	74.5
Mixed and Annual Grass Hay <i>32 Entries</i>	Coggins Farms Echols County, GA	23.5	63.3	150.4
	Eckl Farm Lauderdale, AL	18.6	62.5	150.1
	Rusty Thompson Woodford County, KY	18.2	61.8	145.6
Grass Baleage <i>2 Entries</i>	Verner Farms Morgan County, GA	13.8	66.8	189.5
	Frank Malcolm Jasper County, GA	14.7	57.4	114.3
Legume Baleage <i>1 Entry</i>	Coggins Farms Echols County, GA	18.0	64.6	173.9

Think you can do better? Submit your sample in 2012 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.