

Forage Supply Decisions

As we enter July, many producers have already harvested or are gearing up to harvest their first cut. The first cutting makes up a major portion of the entire season's forage yield and it is important to consider both the yield and the quality. Early data on yield and quality can help inform management decisions throughout the remainder of the season and factors into overall crop profitability. As feed is the largest annual expense of any livestock operation, meeting the nutritional requirements of your herd/flock as cost-effectively as possible is imperative every year. In a dry year, it is even more important.

Three facts to remember when matching forage volume and quality to livestock requirements:

1.

Perennial forage stands have a yield/quality trade-off as maturity and yield increases, the overall quality decreases. While many producers can approximate quality from stage of growth, the only way to know if you have hit your quality targets is to feed test.

2.

Quality requirements vary depending on the type/class of animal and the timing within their production cycle they are fed. It is generally more economical to try to match harvest timing to their needs.

3.

Forage testing on dry hay can be done as soon as harvest is completed. With haylage and silage it is best to wait until it has reached its stable phase and is cured (minimum three to six weeks).

If the weather affects your first cut harvest timing and the forage is over or under mature, then the quality and volume of what you have harvested can guide your future harvest timing and the quality and volume of your forage/supplement purchases. It is strongly suggested that you take forage quality tests immediately after harvesting in addition to tracking the volume harvested. In addition, consider:

- ↳ Does this volume meet your livestock's projected needs?
- ↳ Does the quality meet or exceed their needs?
- ↳ Will your next cutting(s) fill any gaps from the first cut?

If you have identified gaps, it can be an opportunity to look at purchasing forage to fill the gaps early as there is more time to coordinate transportation. For producers with expectation of additional harvests (irrigation), this can be an opportunity to review management decisions to optimize yield. Decisions could include nutrient applications, irrigation, and harvest timing management, as well as consideration towards seeding of an annual crop as emergency forage for harvest or grazing later.

Depending on the gaps identified this may also be the time to have a discussion with an Agrologist with expertise in forage production or livestock nutrition.

Taking a forage sample:

1. **Identify a lot of hay: (same type of forage and harvest timing)**
2. **Take a representative sample: (use a bale core tool and sample 15+ bales)**
3. **Proper Handling: (label properly, seal within a bag and ship quickly)**
4. **Ask for the correct analysis: (depending on livestock type and goals)**

Suggested tests from different labs:

Fraser Analytical
<http://fraseranalytical.com>

- NIR1 (A1) Basic NIR Analysis
- NIR2 (A2) NIR + Wet chemistry Minerals
 - Can add Plus option to either for Fiber Digestibility (NDFd)
- Can add nitrates

Nutrilytical
<https://nutrilytical.ca>

- Standard NIR + Minerals
- Can add nitrates

A&L

<https://www.alcanada.com/index>

- Package FN1: basic package
- Package FN1WM: basic package with wet minerals
- Package FN2WM: complete NIR with wet minerals
- Nitrates code: INOD030

**Central Testing
Laboratory Ltd.**
<https://www.ctl.mb.ca/contact/>

- Minerals done with NIR packages (1FFNIR- B & 2FFNIR-B) are done by wet chemistry

Further information on determining a uniform “lot” of feed, collecting a proper sample and guidance for testing parameters and labs can be found below:

↳ [Sampling Feed for Analysis – North Dakota State University](#)

Have any additional questions? Contact AgriService BC

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