

## **Rural Roots & Research**

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### **“Feed, Forage, and Fall”**

The crisp autumn air signals that winter is approaching, making this an ideal time for livestock producers to focus on winter feed planning. Ensuring your livestock's nutritional needs are met is crucial for their health and productivity during the colder months.

We have many tools as cattle producers today. A variety of tools have been created to help cattle producers manage different sources of variability and predict animal performance. Today, we often think of complex tools like EPDs or genomic testing. However, some of our simple tools, like body condition scoring and testing of feeds, are still crucial to being successful.

The underlying reason we evaluate the composition of our feedstuffs is that the quality of those feedstuffs can range significantly. Nutritionists and producers often use average values when discussing feeds and forages. Feedstuffs, especially forages, can vary widely in their nutritional composition due to various factors, including forage species, stage of maturity at harvest, and weather conditions during the growing season.

For example, our K-State Extension Beef Systems Specialist Justin Waggoner states that Dairy One Laboratories maintains an online feed composition library. The average crude protein content (dry matter basis) of straw in the database from 2000-2018 (5790 samples) is 5.4%, with a range of crude protein values reported of 2.97-7.81%. Although there is no additional information regarding the forages in the database, the numbers illustrate that not all “straw is straw”.

Weather conditions have a significant effect on the quality of harvested forages. In some cases, where harvest was delayed for whatever reason, forage quality may be below average. In other cases, a well-timed harvest could lead to average or above average forage quality. Forage testing is the tool that producers need to take out of the “management toolbox” this fall. Fall is the perfect time to test your available forages and get a “feeding game plan” ready for wintertime.

You need to ask yourself, are you willing to utilize forages and feedstuffs in your nutrition program this winter without data? That’s like purchasing a bull without using the EPD data

to help you make the best management decision possible. If you are not familiar with how to properly sample your feedstuffs or submit a sample for analysis, visit the extension office. We can assist you in proper sampling of your feedstuffs, have tools like a forage probe you can borrow from the office, help you submit a sample, and select the appropriate analytical tests to ensure you get the data you need to help build your winter nutrition program. We also offer ration-building assistance once we receive your analysis back from the lab. Let us help you create your winter-feeding game plan.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension, call the office at 785-537-6350, email me, Lindsay Shorter, at [lindsayshorter@ksu.edu](mailto:lindsayshorter@ksu.edu), or stop by the office. Be sure to follow Riley County K-State Research and Extension on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Riley County 4-H program.