

2013 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 2013 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.

Weather is always a major limiting factor when attempting to produce high quality forage. In the past 7 years, drought has been the major limitation. This year, however, near daily rainfall across the SE region during the first several months of the growing season greatly limited our producer's ability to get into their hayfields. Then, widespread challenges with disease and insect damage in the later part of the season further reduced quality and quantity. These challenges resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of entries from our quality hay producers, as we received only 109 entries to the SEHC in 2013 (a 30% decrease from last year).

These weather challenges also placed a drag on the average quality of the samples. The average relative forage quality (RFQ) value in each category was down from 2012. Nonetheless, our winning producers found a way to make high quality hay! The winning RFQ values for each category were on par with or greater than the winning RFQ values for previous years, with the exception of the alfalfa and perennial peanut category. This year's weather challenges really highlight that good management can make a difference over the long run.

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 2013 Southeastern Hay Contest. (109 Sample Entries)

Category	Farm	Crude Protein, %	TDN,%	RFQ
Warm Season Per. Grass Hay <i>45 Entries</i>	Lander Equest			139
	Greenwood, GA			
	Calvin Sears			117
	Douglas, GA			
	Lander Equest			107
	Greenwood, GA			
			<u><i>Category Average</i></u>	82.5
Per. Peanut/Alfalfa Hay <i>6 Entries</i>	Vickers Still Farm			187
	Ambrose, GA			
	Vickers Still Farm			175
	Ambrose, GA			
	Vickers Still Farm			150
	Ambrose, GA			
			<u><i>Category Average</i></u>	140.8
Cool Season Per. Grass Hay <i>6 Entries</i>	Duncan Legacy Farm			127
	Carrollton, GA			
	Red Oak Farms			113
	Danville, AL			
	Timberline Farms			107
	Barnesville, GA			
			<u><i>Category Average</i></u>	111.2
Mixed and Annual Grass Hay <i>40 Entries</i>	Joe Armstrong			156
	Cairo, GA			
	Joe Armstrong			131
	Cairo, GA			
	Joe Armstrong			127
	Cairo, GA			
			<u><i>Category Average</i></u>	98.8
Grass Baleage <i>11 Entries</i>	Blackwater Cattle Co.			191
	Lake Park, GA			
	Red Oak Farms			153
	Danville, AL			
	Blackwater Cattle Co.			135
	Lake Park, GA			
			<u><i>Category Average</i></u>	119
Legume Baleage <i>1 Entries</i>	Blackwater Cattle Co.			128
	Lake Park, GA			
			<u><i>Category Average</i></u>	128

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.