

# 2014 Southeastern Hay Contest Results

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Sunbelt Agricultural Exposition, Moultrie Georgia

A Cooperative Extension Effort of Auburn University, Clemson University, The University of Florida, and The University of Georgia

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Final results for the 2014 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. This year, dry conditions in the later half of the growing season caused drought to be a major limitation. Drought stress increased the incidence of high nitrate levels in the forage in 2014. Still, the forage quality was much higher than in 2013, when near daily rainfall greatly limited the SE hay producer's ability to harvest good quality forage. The average relative forage quality (RFQ) was higher in each category in 2014 compared to last year's results. Also, the winning entries from each category were far greater in 2014! Good management can make a remarkable improvement in forage quality in both favorable and unfavorable weather conditions.

The number of entries in the SEHC was also dramatically increased compared to previous years. We received 185 entries to the contest compared to only 109 entries in 2013.

**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 2014 Southeastern Hay Contest (185 Sample Entries).**

# Results (185 Entries)

Category	Farm	Crude Protein, %	TDN,%	RFQ
Warm Season Per. Grass Hay 94 Entries	Eddie Turner Tennille, GA	14.9	62.0	146
	Eddie Turner Tennille, GA	15.1	61.6	143
	Eddie Turner Tennille, GA	19.8	61.3	143
				<i>Category Average</i>
Per. Peanut/Alfalfa Hay 9 Entries	Roper Farms Canon, GA	25.1	68.4	240
	Roper Farms Canon, GA	22.2	68.8	219
	Bohlen & Son Farm Madison, GA	24.8	68.8	215
				<i>Category Average</i>
Cool Season Per. Grass Hay 12 Entries	Davis Farms Carnesville, GA	13.5	61.5	141
	Slater Chandler Colbert, GA	12.9	61.2	139
	McDonald Farms Covington, GA	14.2	60.7	138
				<i>Category Average</i>
Mixed and Annual Grass Hay 52 Entries	Joe Armstrong Cairo, GA	12.9	65.2	160
	Trails End Farm Colbert, GA	14.8	64.3	156
	Bohlen & Son Farm Madison, GA	26.5	62.7	151
				<i>Category Average</i>
Grass Baleage 17 Entries	Yon Family Farms Ridge Spring, SC	13.9	74.0	221
	Leavelle Farms Buhl, AL	14.0	66.8	171
	Walters Farm Barnesville, GA	19.8	66.2	168
				<i>Category Average</i>
Legume Baleage 1 Entry	Yon Family Farms Ridge Spring, SC	24.2	69.5	200
			<i>Category Average</i>	200