



2015 - Results

October 20-22, 2015

Sunbelt Agricultural Exposition, Moultrie Georgia

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

The 2015 Southeastern Hay Contest (SEHC) presented by Massey Ferguson was bigger than ever! The competition was fierce, with 375 entries vying for the top spot. This is a considerable increase over the 185 entries received in 2014. Final results for the 2015 SEHC are listed in Table 1. The results are broken down into the seven categories of the contest: warm season perennial grass hay (bermudagrass, bahiagrass), alfalfa hay, perennial peanut hay, perennial cool season grass (tall fescue, orchardgrass, etc.) hay, mixed and annual grass hay, grass baleage, and legume baleage. This contest is held in conjunction with the Sunbelt Agricultural Expo in Moultrie, GA. Winners were announced during the opening ceremonies at the Sunbelt Expo on Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2015. In each of the seven categories, the highest three entries in terms of relative forage quality (RFQ) received cash prizes. First place received \$125, second received \$75, and the third place entry received \$50. Top honors in the warm season perennial grass hay category also receive the use of a new Massey Ferguson DM Series Professional disc mower for the 2016 hay production season! The highest overall RFQ score received the use of a new Massey Ferguson DM RK Series rotary rake for the 2016 hay production season plus \$1000 in cash! This year, the winner of the warm season perennial grass hay category was Yon Family Farms from Ridge Spring, SC who had an RFQ of 161. The overall high RFQ was over 300, which was from some extremely high quality alfalfa made at McGee Ranch in Idalou, TX.

Weather is always a major limiting factor when attempting to produce high quality forage. This year, dry conditions in the middle part of the growing season caused drought to be a major limitation for many producers. Drought stress increased the incidence of high nitrate levels in the forage in 2015. In fact, 11.5% of the samples submitted to the contest were disqualified because nitrates were greater than 5000 ppm. Still, the forage quality this year was very high. The average relative forage quality (RFQ) was on par with or equal to the highest values in the Contest's 11-year history. Good management can make a remarkable improvement in forage quality in both favorable and unfavorable weather conditions.

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

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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 2015 Southeastern Hay Contest (375 Sample Entries).

Categories and Farm	City	State	CP, %	TDN, %	RFQ	Sponsors
1. Warm Season Per. Grass Hay: 144 Entries						
Yon Family Farms	Ridge Spring	SC	19.2	64.6	161	 <small>770.532.0816 - GEORGIATWINE.COM</small>
Yon Family Farms	Ridge Spring	SC	15.6	64.2	158	
Eddy Turner	Tennille	GA	19.9	62.7	150	
Category Average 117						
2. Alfalfa Hay: 31 Entries						
McGee Ranch	Idalou	TX	29.0	74.7	300*	
Steve Mitchell Mountainside Farm	Taylorsville	NC	26.1	73.3	283	
Gamble Farm - Daryl Manning	Summerville	GA	23.9	71.9	233	
Category Average 213						
3. Per. Peanut Hay: 5 Entries						
Justin Williams	Graceville	FL	14.1	67.0	179	 <small>A FIVE STAR SOLUTION DISTRIBUTED BY GEORGIA TWINE 770.532.0816 - WWW.GEORGIATWINE.COM</small>
Basford Farms	Grand Ridge	FL	17.8	62.9	157	
Farrell Roberts	Tifton	GA	14.7	62.3	143	
Category Average 147						
4. Cool Season Per. Grass Hay: 25 Entries						
James Burton	LaFayette	GA	17.4	63.6	150	
Dustin Braswell	Danielsville	GA	13.1	61.6	142	
Oak Ridge Ranch	Dahlonega	GA	13.0	61.3	140	
Category Average 119						
5. Mixed, Annual Grass or Other Hays: 74 Entries						
Bill Grubb	Comer	GA	20.9	69.5	172	
Sandbriar Farms Kyle Knight	Sylvania	GA	12.3	64.7	158	
Jim Patton	Comer	GA	14.8	64.2	155	
Category Average 119						
6. Grass Baleage: 84 Entries						
Walters Farm	Barnesville	GA	23.2	72.70	211	
Walters Farm	Barnesville	GA	23.9	70.70	196	
Yon Family Farms	Ridge Spring	SC	20.8	70.00	194	
Category Average 144						
7. Legume Baleage: 12 Entries						
Yon Family Farms	Ridge Spring	SC	25.5	74.0	239	
Yon Family Farms	Ridge Spring	SC	24.8	72.8	213	
Yon Family Farms	Ridge Spring	SC	20.4	74.8	197	
Category Average 177						