

Handling Flood-Damaged Hay/Haylage Fields

Salvaging Wet Legumes or Wet Grass Hay

After flooding, some overly-mature alfalfa or clover-grass hay meadows can be partially salvaged by cutting and mixing with quality silage. It is critical to minimize any contaminants from the hay and to ensure that all legumes are free of mold that might affect animals that are fed the green chop. Legumes that get wet will mold; they should not be ensiled.

Often there is not a sufficient amount of forage available for mixing wet grass hays to achieve an economical hay/haylage mix. However, grass is less likely to mold than legumes, and there may be situations when the grass can be harvested and ensiled if mixed with quality ensilage. By ensiling two or more loads of quality hay silage before adding a load cut from wet hay, this forage may be salvaged. However, the nutritional value should be sampled to guide one on how best to utilize this ensilage. If nutritional content is low, this mix is not desirable forage for lactating dairy cows.

The advantage to this approach is that the damaged crop can be removed quickly in order to reduce the detrimental effect on the next cutting.

Ensiling

Ensilage perennials in a conventional upright, horizontal bunker or temporary trench silo. To make a trench silo:

- Locate the trench where drainage is good.
- Design the trench for efficient feeding. A longer, fairly narrow, deep trench results in less silage deterioration and feeding loss than a wide, shallow trench.

To make the silage:

- Direct cut or wilt to 65 to 70 percent moisture.
- Chop finely.
- Pack thoroughly.
- If available, add 100 to 200 pounds of corn and cob chop to each ton of ensile nutrients. This will improve fermentation, quality and palatability.

Legume or Hay Meadows

To minimize damage to hay/hayfields which were flooded:

- Remove existing “old” growth soon from fields that have not been harvested. This will allow a good crop after the flood.
- Utilize the grass as either hay or silage.
- If hay crop is silt-damaged, use a flail harvester or similar machine to spread the foliage somewhat uniformly back onto the field. Then immediately top-dress the cut over hay meadow with fertilizer. You may also want to apply nitrogen to stimulate grasses. Check with your county Extension agent for recommended application rates.
- On fields harvested just prior to the flood, make crop into hay or silage. Then top-dress with fertilizer. Check with your county Extension agent for specific recommendations.
- If post-flood growth is short or yellow, top-dress immediately.

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