

**INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY**  
**By Bill Arndorfer**  
**Butler-Grundy County Extension Educator**  
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**Forage Testing Preliminary Results**

Last fall I wrote about a forage testing project that was available to producers who wanted to have weather impacted forage tested in order to determine the nutrient value of the crop. As you remember, there was an excess of rainfall last summer which caused delays in cutting and baling hay which resulted in overly mature and rain damaged hay. There were about four hundred samples submitted for testing. The preliminary results of those samples were included in the following Iowa State University Extension news release.

As forages mature, they decrease in both energy and protein, and over-mature forage can lead to long-term negative consequences in the herd, according to Iowa State University (ISU) Extension beef program specialist Denise Schwab. With this in mind, the Iowa Beef Center requested help and financial assistance from ISU's Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Iowa Forage and Grassland Council, and the Southern Iowa Forage and Livestock Committee to initiate a forage testing project.

“As of mid-January, more than four hundred samples had been submitted to Dairyland Labs as part of this project, with about three hundred fifty of those samples being conventional beef cow hay or corn stalks,” Schwab said. “The test results are important to producers.”

A quick look at the data shows that thirteen percent of the samples were below fifty percent total digestible nutrients (TDN) and another thirty four percent were between fifty and fifty five percent TDN.

“While many variables can affect the beef cow’s nutrient requirements, the full feed of these hays would be considered ‘marginal’ to ‘deficient’ in meeting the needs of the average pregnant beef cow during the winter months,” Schwab said. “Another method of looking at forage quality is based on Relative Feed Value (RFV), with one hundred being equivalent to full bloom alfalfa hay. Of the hays tested, seventy eight percent were below one hundred RFV, meaning there’s a need for energy supplementation in those diets.”

What do these results mean to the cattle producer? At the very least, Schwab explained, conventional hay feeding programs may not be providing the required nutrients for late gestation cows, meaning some form of energy supplementation is required. “If your forages haven't been tested for nutrient content, it's critical that you closely monitor the body condition of your cows. Ideally, each cow would have a body condition score of six at calving time to improve the likelihood of her cycling and rebreeding for next year,” she said. “Keep in mind that first cutting hay made in June is likely to be deficient in energy for the gestating beef cow and likely would need significant supplementation.”

If you have questions on winter feeding of the beef cow, contact Russ Euken, ISU Extension beef program specialist at 641-923-2856. The Iowa Beef Center (IBC) was established in 1996 with the goal of supporting the growth and vitality of the state’s beef cattle industry. For more information about IBC, visit [www.iowabeefcenter.org](http://www.iowabeefcenter.org).