

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

By: Lindsay Shorter

K-State Research and Extension Greenwood County

Agriculture Extension Agent

“Feed, Forage, and Fall”

We have many tools as cattle producers today. A variety of tools that have been created to help cattle producers manage different sources of variability and predict animal performance. Today we often think of complex tools like EPDs or genomic testing. However, some of our simple tools like body condition scoring and testing of feeds are still crucial to being successful.

The underlying reason we evaluate the composition of our feedstuffs is because the quality of those feedstuffs can range greatly. Nutritionist and producers often use average values when discussing feeds and forages. Feedstuffs, especially forages can vary widely in their nutrition composition due to various factors including forage species, stage of maturity at harvest and weather conditions during the growing season.

For example, our K-State Extension Beef Systems Specialist Justin Waggoner states that Dairy One Laboratories, maintains an online feed composition library. The average crude protein content (dry matter basis) of straw in the database from 2000-2018 (5790 samples) is 5.4%, crude protein, the range of crude protein values reported was 2.97-7.81%. Although, no there is no additional information regarding the forages in the database, the numbers illustrate that not all “straw is straw”.

Weather conditions have a major effect on the quality of harvested forages. In some cases, where harvest was delayed for whatever reason, forage quality may be below average. In other cases, a well-timed harvest, could lead to average or above average forage quality. Forage testing is the tool that producers need to take out of the “management toolbox” this fall. Fall is the perfect time to test your available forages and get a “feeding game plan” ready for winter time.

You need to ask yourself, are you willing to utilize forages and feedstuffs in your nutrition program this winter without data? That’s like purchasing a bull without using the EPD data to help you make the best management decision possible. If you are not familiar with how to properly sample your feedstuffs or submit a sample for analysis visit the extension office. We can assist you in proper sampling protocol for your feedstuffs, help you submit a sample and select the appropriate analytical tests to ensure you get the data you need to help build your winter nutrition program. We also offer ration building assistance once we receive your analysis back from the lab. Let us help you create your winter feeding game plan.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Lindsay Shorter, at lindsayshorter@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.