Understanding Round Bale Hay for Horses

Equine Reproduction SVC

Grazing and Reduce the Need for Hay

Grazing is far less expensive than any form of hay; good pasture management year round will see you through the winter. Hay feeders, such as rings, nets, or huts, will greatly reduce feeding losses. As always, feeding several horses in a pasture or drylot is easier using round bales, but requires special considerations. Remember that some feeders require equipment to lift and move. Herd dynamics might also play a role in the type of hay feeder selected. In extremely large herds that consume a round bale in 24 hours, feeding losses can become significant. Feeding losses are a major concern when feeding any hay. Hay producers invest a significant amount of time and money into growing, baling, and storing hay, only for horses to waste it. We will explore these feeding losses and how to best utilize each.

Feeding losses typically include:

- 3% animal refusal when stored in a barn
- 43% loss and 66% animal refusal when stored on the ground, compared to 2% loss and 3% animal refusal when stored inside
- Never stack bales when storing outside unless they are tarped. One study on round bale storage documented 43% loss and 66% animal refusal when stored on the ground, compared to 2% loss and 3% animal refusal when stored inside.

Handling:

- Round bales stored outside and exposed to the elements often develop a deterioriated outer layer that should be removed before feeding.
- Water better than bales with twine, so net wrapping is preferred when storing uncovered.

Baling Hay

Hay baled at higher moisture levels is more likely to heat, causing forage quality losses and potentially mold. Bales with heavy ropes or twine used for bundling are less susceptible to mold. Bales can be treated with fungicides, but this is expensive.

Preparation:

- Round bales are much easier to lift than square bales. Be sure to purchase equipment to move them safely. Bale feeders come in many styles, types, and sizes and should be carefully evaluated to select one that works best for your operation. See the University of Minnesota article " for a comparison of feeder types.

Handling:

- Round bales that are held together using "net wrap" shed 3% animal refusal when stored in a barn. Round bales that are held together using "net wrap" shed 3% animal refusal when stored in a barn. Round bales that are held together using "net wrap" shed 3% animal refusal when stored in a barn. Round bales that are held together using "net wrap" shed 3% animal refusal when stored in a barn. Round bales that are held together using "net wrap" shed 3% animal refusal when stored in a barn.

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