

Reducing Hay Wastage
Clyde Lane, Jr.
Professor- Animal Science

Hay wastage has always been a problem in beef operations. The problem has gotten much worse since large round bales have been utilized.

The wastage of hay is the greatest when animals have free access. Enclosing the hay in some type of feeder helps reduce the amount wasted. Even with hay in a feeder, animals pull hay out, drop it on the ground and either get manure or mud on it. In muddy situations, there is no second chance for the animal to pick it up.

Research indicates that the design of the feeder can have an effect on the amount of hay wasted. A recent research trial conducted at Michigan State University compared hay wastage using a cone feeder, ring feeder, trailer and a cradle. The results using mature cows showed the following losses: Cone feeder – 3.5%; Ring feeder – 6.1%; Trailer – 11.4%; and Cradle – 14.6%. The researchers could not give a definitive reason for the greater loss with the trailer and cradle, however, they speculated that animals were not in a grazing posture and tended to pull more hay out and drop it on the ground.

Based on the research it would be best to utilize cone feeders, however, the cost of these feeders compared to ring feeders may limit their use by many producers.

A few other suggestions for management to reduce wastage include limiting the amount of hay provided to animals at one time, making animals consume all of the desirable hay in the feeder before more hay is added, keeping feeders out of the mud as much as possible, and culling cows with aggressive behavior. Cows that butt other cows while eating hay from a feeder will cause the animal to drop the hay on the ground. For additional information, contact the local Extension office.