



Results of the 2019 Southeastern Hay Contest Presented by Massey Ferguson

October 15-17, 2019

Sunbelt Agricultural Exposition, Moultrie Georgia

A Cooperative Extension Effort of Auburn University, Clemson University, The University of Florida, and The University of Georgia

The 2019 Southeastern Hay Contest (SEHC) presented by Massey Ferguson celebrates its 15th edition with a record of 380 entries vying for the top spot. Since 2004, the SEHC, a partnership between Auburn University, Clemson University, The University of Florida and The University of Georgia has been a key tool for promoting hay quality in the Southeast United States. Producers from 7 states – Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Alabama, South Carolina, Arkansas and Texas – competed in seven categories of hay and baleage: warm season perennial grass hay (bermudagrass, bahiagrass), alfalfa hay, perennial peanut hay, perennial cool season grass (tall fescue, orchardgrass, etc.) hay, mixed and annual grass hay, grass baleage, and legume baleage. In each of the categories, the highest three entries in terms of relative forage quality (RFQ) received cash prizes, proudly sponsored by our industry partners. First place received \$150, second received \$100, and the third place entry received \$75. The best of the best also receives a choice of the use of a new Massey Ferguson DM Series disc mower or RK Series rotary rake for the 2020 hay production season plus \$1000 in cash! This year, the overall best went to Yon Family Farms, from Ridge Spring, SC, for their legume baleage that had an RFQ of 241. Final results for the 2019 SEHC are listed in Table 1. This contest is held in conjunction with the Sunbelt Agricultural Expo in Moultrie, GA, and winners were announced during the opening ceremonies at the Sunbelt Expo on Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2019.

More than a competition, the SEHC is a tool to gauge the progress of hay farmers, who learn and improve their operation from each sample submitted. Although winning entries always have impressively high RFQ, the important point is that category averages are also high. According to Bill Conrad, who won the perennial peanut category and placed in the top 3 in the alfalfa category, good hay is a combination of proper cutting time and good agronomic practices, especially split fertilization after each cut. He says that it is great having the recognition for the hard work especially from fellow producers, but he would like to see more attention from hay consumers for the value of high-quality hay. When purchasing hay by quality, the buyer knows the nutrient content of that material and can more accurately balance the supplement required. This can result in less cost for the operation and increased efficiency of production, and the capacity of paying a bonus for a product of known quality. More information on how to enter future editions of the SEHC can be found at www.sehaycontest.com.



Table 1. Category winners from the 2019 Southeastern Hay Contest (380 Sample Entries).

Categories and Farm	City	State	Crude Protein, %	TDN, %	RFQ	Sponsors
1. Warm Season Per. Grass Hay: 139 entries						
Jeff Bacon	Dudley	GA	18.7	62.6	151	
Scott Chambers	Braselton	GA	16.1	62.2	148	
Eddy Turner Farm	Tennille	GA	15.1	61.5	146	
<i>Category Average</i>					117	
2. Alfalfa Hay: 15 entries						
Stegall Farms, LLC	Peachland	NC	23.8	69.4	236	
Cline Farms	Valdese	NC	26.3	69.0	233	
Bill Conrad	Malone	FL	21.2	71.4	231	
<i>Category Average</i>					194	
3. Per. Peanut Hay: 13 entries						
Bill Conrad	Malone	FL	15.7	69.0	216	
White Farms	Poulan	GA	15.4	67.2	186	
Williams Farm	Graceville	FL	15.1	67.0	176	
<i>Category Average</i>					169	
4. Cool Season Per. Grass Hay: 47 entries						
Stegall Farms, LLC	Peachland	NC	23.0	65.3	165	
Everett Williams	Madison	GA	15.4	64.0	156	
Chennault Plantation	Tignall	GA	13.8	63.1	151	
<i>Category Average</i>					119	
5. Mixed, Annual Grass or Other Hays: 73 entries						
Boyt (B and B) Farm Services	Thomaston	GA	14.7	66.1	165	
Jeff Bacon	Dudley	GA	14.5	64.7	161	
Charles Snell	Graceville	FL	7.1	68.0	155	
<i>Category Average</i>					121	
6. Grass Baleage: 89 entries						
Walter's Farm LLC	Barnesville	GA	19.2	73.9	221	
Callaway Cattle Co	Hogansville	GA	15.3	73.2	216	
Wheless Farm	Lexington	GA	14.6	69.9	193	
<i>Category Average</i>					145	
7. Legume Baleage: 4 entries						
Yon Family Farms	Ridge Spring	SC	22.6	76.1	241	
G & S Farms	Chipley	FL	17.3	62.3	139	
Fence Row Farms	Marshallville	NC	14.3	65.7	133	
<i>Category Average</i>					164	

What is Relative Forage Quality? RFQ is an index used to represent different forages relative to their overall nutritive value (total digestible nutrients) and predicted dry matter intake. The index was developed by the University of Florida and the University of Wisconsin and is considered a better fit for comparing forages (especially southern forages) for accounting for the digestible fiber as determinant of intake. In the past, hay quality prediction equations were based on the fiber *concentration* of the hay crop. However, forage crops can have similar fiber content but have very different digestibility. For instance, Tifton 85 bermudagrass often has a higher fiber concentration than other bermudagrass varieties, yet it is more digestible. This improved digestibility results in enhanced animal performance but is not reflected just considering traditional forage nutritive value parameters. This value is a single, easy to interpret number that improves producer understanding of a forage's nutritive quality and helps in establishing a fair market value for the product. Since 2003, hundreds of warm season samples have been used to refine the RFQ equation for bermudagrass and other warm season forages at the UGA's Feed and Environmental Water Lab in Athens, the official SEHC laboratory.

How can Relative Forage Quality help me? RFQ allows hay producers to easily categorize and price hay lots based on relative quality, and livestock producers to balance supplemental diet based on the quality of the hay being offered. Producers can purchase hay lots depending on its end use. For example, there is little need to feed high-quality hay to livestock that could easily utilize poorer quality forage. Hay with a RFQ of 100 or more can usually be economically fed to maintain beef cows, while hay with an RFQ of 125-150 is adequate for stocker cattle or young growing replacement heifers, and hay with an RFQ of 140-160 is suitable for dairy cattle in the first three months of lactation. It is also easy to see that Relative Forage Quality could provide the framework for a quality hay marketing system. For instance, hay with a RFQ of 155 could conceptually be labeled "premium" hay, while hay with an RFQ of 100 could be labeled "fair". This simple system could allow producers to price hay consistently and fairly across harvest maturity, fertilization regimes, or plant species (i.e. bermudagrass, bahiagrass, perennial peanut, or tall fescue).

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