

2024 Southeastern Hay Contest

PRESENTED BY MASSEY FERGUSON

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The Southeastern Hay Contest (SEHC) is celebrating its 20th year of proudly recognizing our regional producers who grow and harvest high quality hay. The contest was developed by Extension agents for Southeast forage producers. Their involvement was pivotal to the success of the program during its development in 2004 and will continue to play an important role into the future. Extension agents not only promote the contest, but also use it in education and outreach throughout their counties and regions. The SEHC continues to fulfill its mission to bring awareness to the importance of hay testing and managing livestock feed needs through nutritive value determination. Over time, the contest has expanded to nine categories that producers can enter forage samples, including: warm-season perennial grass hay, warm-season annual grass hay, alfalfa hay, all other legume hay, cool-season perennial grass hay, grass-legume mixed hay, cool-season annual grass hay, grass baleage, and legume baleage. The samples are ranked based on relative forage quality (RFQ) and the top 3 entries in each category receive a cash prize. The overall winner also receives a choice of the use of a new Massey Ferguson DM Series disc mower or RK Series rotary rake for the 2025 hay production season plus \$2,000 in cash!

The 2024 SEHC holds a new record number of entries at 496 submissions from nine states across the SE region. It is a considerable achievement given the challenges hay producers have faced over the past year, including the extensive drought this season. Despite these challenges, there has been some very high-quality hay produced. This year's category winners are summarized in the table below. The 2024 top RFQ was in the alfalfa hay category from Beeson Farms from Climax, NC with an index breaking 330. Beeson Farms won the Grand Prize in 2022 (also alfalfa hay) and therefore is ineligible to win the Grand Prize in 2024. As a result, the Grand Prize goes to John Carter from McAlpin, FL from the legume + grass mixed hay category with an RFQ of 309.

The SEHC continues to increase its reach and strengthen its commitment to education. We will continue to lead a sponsored session on forage establishment at the American Forage and Grassland Conference, organize local hay quality workshops, and much more! Again, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of our Extension agents, who engage producers and collect samples, and our many category sponsors, as well as our title sponsor Massey Ferguson. We encourage you to continue the tradition and “prove your hay is the best” by submitting samples to next year's contest. Submissions are open year-round, check www.sehaycontest.com for more information, or contact your local county agent or forage Extension specialist.



2024 Southeastern Hay Contest Winners

Categories and Farm	City	State	CP, %	TDN, %	RFQ	Sponsors
Warm-Season Perennial Grass Hay: 155 entries						
Wally Millsap	Gentry	AR	22.0	66.3	171	
Jeff Bacon	Dudley	GA	18.7	64.2	158	
Maple Farms	North	SC	15.1	63.1	152	
Category Average					115	
Alfalfa Hay: 27 entries						
Beeson Farms	Climax	NC	28.1	73.8	330	
Ronnie Green	Murrayville	GA	31.8	69.5	288	
Mountainside Farm	Taylorsville	NC	25.8	71.1	282	
Category Average					191	
Other Legume Hay: 23 entries						
Elberta Hay Co.	Elberta	AL	16.5	68.9	228	
Bill Conrad	Malone	FL	20.1	68.0	214	
Walt Guettler	Chipley	FL	17.3	67.2	202	
Category Average					173	
Cool-Season Perennial Grass Hay: 94 entries						
Cline Farms	Valdese	NC	18.1	70.7	195	
Brandon Creech	Zebulon	NC	13.6	67.1	173	
Mountainside Farm	Taylorsville	NC	11.8	67	170	
Category Average					111	
Legume + Grass Mixed Hay: 15 entries						
John Carter	McAlpin	FL	27.6	72.6	309	
Walnut Hills Farm	Sharpsburg	KY	20.8	67.4	177	
Chester Farms	Martin	TN	17.5	63.8	139	
Category Average					128	
Cool-Season Annual Grass Hay: 63 entries						
Jim Galloway	Oxford	GA	9.2	69.4	175	
Yon Family Farms	Ridge Spring	SC	10.4	65.8	159	
R & A Farms	Brodnax	VA	8.4	67.0	158	
Category Average					116	
Warm-Season Annual Grass Hay: 17 entries						
Smith Farms	Elberton	GA	13.5	61.1	139	
Josh Cabe	Martin	GA	11.6	60.1	132	
McMichael Angus Farm	Monticello	GA	10.5	56.1	111	
Category Average					108	
Grass Baleage: 92 entries						
Leikri Farms	Molena	GA	18.2	71.4	203	
Caldwell Farm and Land LLC	Concord	GA	13.3	71.5	202	
Walters Farms	Barnesville	GA	15.4	71.2	201	
Category Average					146	
Legume Baleage: 10 entries						
Walters Farms	Barnesville	GA	15.8	67.8	178	
Cole Roper	Carnesville	GA	14.7	63.2	145	
Brandon Creech	Zebulon	NC	19.2	61.7	140	
Category Average					140	
OVERALL GRAND PRIZE						
John Carter Legume + Grass Mixed Hay	McAlpin	FL	27.6	72.6	309	
Extension Agent Awards						
Florida Agent Award	Mark Mauldin			Washington County		
Georgia Agent Award	Hailey Partain			Upson and Lamar Counties		
Tennessee Agent Award	Jonathan Johns			Marshall County		

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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 researchers at the University of Florida and 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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