2026 Southeastern Hay Contest

PRESENTED BY MASSEY FERGUSON

Liliane Silva, Clemson | Katie Mason, UT | Lisa Baxter, UGA | Uttam Saha, UGA

The Southeastern Hay Contest (SEHC) has proudly recognized our regional producers who grow and harvest high-quality hay for the last 23 years. The contest was originally developed by Extension agents for Southeast forage producers. Their involvement was pivotal to the success of this program during its development in 2004 and will continue to play an important role into the future. The SEHC continues to fulfill its mission to raise awareness of the importance of hay testing and of managing livestock feed needs through nutritive value determination. 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 2027 hay production season, plus $2,000 in cash!

Entries into the 2026 SEHC surpassed previous years and set a new record number of entries at **628 submissions from ten states** across the Southeast. Despite climatic challenges over the last year, there have been some very high-quality stored forages produced. This year's category winners are summarized in the table below. **The 2026 Grand Prize goes to Beeson Farms from Climax, NC, from the alfalfa hay category, with another incredible RFQ of 341**.

The SEHC continues to increase its reach and strengthen its commitment to education. Again, we would like to **acknowledge the efforts of our Extension agents**, who engage producers and collect samples. The agent award winners are in the first table below. 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.

2026 Southeastern Hay Contest Top Agent Award Winners

State	Agent	County	Entries	Sponsor
Top Florida Agent	Mark Mauldin	Washington	34	MAYO AG SERVICES
Top Georgia Agent	Greg Pittman	Jackson	114	GAC GEORGIA AGRIBUSINESS COUNCIL
Top North Carolina Agent	Rachel Owens	Union	7	COASTAL SEEDS LLC
Top Tennessee Agent	Johnathan Johns	Marshall	6	UTEXTENSION INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE

2026 Southeastern Hay Contest Category Winners and the Overall Winner

Entry	City, State	RFQ	TDN	CP	Sponsor
Warm Season Perennial Grass Hay: 204 Entries, 114 Average RFQ					
Eddy Turner Farms	Tennille, GA	160	64.4	17.8	RW GRIFFIN INDUSTRIES, LLC
Jeff Bacon	Dudley, GA	157	63.7	18.0	
Jon Pope	Coats, NC	156	63.5	20.9	
Cool Season Perennial Grass Hay: 93 Entries, 144 Average RFQ					
Equine Forage Farms	Deer Lodge, TN	186	69.0	14.9	CORTEVA agriscience
Beeson Farms	Climax, NC	175	67.2	17.8	
Oak Ridge Ranch, LLC	Dahlonega, GA	170	66.7	12.5	
Warm Season Annual Grass Hay: 38 Entries, 97 Average RFQ					
Hodges Farms	Mansfield, GA	132	59.3	12.3	BARENBRUG
Josh Cabe	Martin, GA	121	57.9	13.9	
Cole Roper	Carnesville, GA	115	55.9	14.2	
Cool Season Annual Grass Hay: 93 Entries, 144 Average RFQ					
Beeson Farms	Climax, NC	214	73	18.2	Southeast AgriSeeds
John Carter	McAlpin, FL	212	72.7	18.4	
Historic Indian Creek Farm	Hoschton, GA	192	70.7	11.2	
All Other Hay: 38 Entries, 108 Average RFQ					**(NEW CATEGORY)**
Todd Trice	Madison, GA	167	67.2	10.3	Southeastern Hay Contest
Abbie Creek Farms	Abbeville, AL	134	60.1	12.4	
Clint Childs	Commerce, GA	124	58.2	11.3	
Alfalfa Hay: 18 Entries, 247 Average RFQ					
Beeson Farms	Climax, NC	341	75.6	25.6	envu
Mountainside Farm	Taylorsville, NC	309	74.3	29.8	
Brandon Creech	Zebulon, NC	296	74.7	25.2	
Other Legume Hay: 32 Entries, 178 Average RFQ					
Elberta Hay Co.	Elberta, AL	234	71.2	18.1	AGRI-KING KEY TO PROFIT
Walt Guettler	Chipley, FL	222	71.6	14.5	
Joey Register	Graceville, FL	219	69.7	12.8	
Grass-Legume Hay: 23 Entries, 163 Average RFQ					
Beeson Farms	Climax, NC	335	78.3	26.3	Athens Seed Co.
Jon Pope	Coats, NC	304	78.3	27.1	
John Carter	McAlpin, FL	262	77.2	23.5	
Baleage: 129 Entries, 145 Average RFQ					
Walters Farms	Barnesville, GA	230	75.2	20.4	PENNINGTON
John Carter	McAlpin, FL	216	69.7	25.5	
Cabe.	Carnesville, GA	213	73.1	15	
Overall Winner					
Beeson Farms Alfalfa Hay Category	**Climax, NC**	**341**	**75.6**	**25.6**	MASSEY FERGUSON

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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 consider 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).

2026 SEHC Executive Committee Contacts

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SOUTHEASTERN HAY CONTEST

Sunbelt AG EXPO MASSEY FERGUSON

The Southeastern Hay Contest is a collaboration between these 13 University Extension Services.