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To: Rains County Leader

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HAY STORAGE

Producers this year have been really blessed with an abundance of hay. Many producers have more hay on hand than they will probably feed this winter. So we need to think about hay storage so we can carry over some hay to next year. Research has shown that you will lose 20-30% per bale of hay in a years' time if it is carried over. There are several ways to reduce that amount of hay loss with proper storage.

Of course the best way to store hay is in a barn but that can be a very costly endeavor if you don't have one available. If hay is to be stored outside, it is desirable to locate the storage site close to the feeding area because bales become more difficult to handle as they weather. It is easier to move them a greater distance when they are new and tightly wrapped.

Well-drained upland storage sites are best. Bottom areas should generally be avoided as they tend to be heavier soils. Also, many bottom areas are prone to flooding, which is detrimental to hay and may limit vehicle access during rainy periods. Hay/soil contact should be avoided if at all possible, but if hay must touch the soil, a sandy well- drained area is greatly preferable to a heavy soil and/or poorly drained site.

Once the storage site has been located, attention should be given to bale placement and orientation. Except when multiple-bale covers are used, large round bales should be stored in rows with sides not touching so as to avoid creating a moisture-holding area between sides. However, the flat ends of bales should be firmly butted against one another. This conserves space and may help protect the bottoms of bales (other than the one on the upper side of the slope) from water flowing down the slope. Properly done, this protects the ends almost as well as if they were part of one continuous bale.

If possible, rows should run north and south so as to allow maximum exposure of the rounded sides to the sun. This increases drying of the rounded surface of bales during the day. At least 3 feet should be left between bale rows to ensure sunlight penetration and allow good air circulation.

If direct hay/soil contact cannot be avoided, taking steps to minimize the amount of water reaching the bales, and the length of time they stay wet, will at least help. A gently sloping site (preferably with a southern exposure to maximize solar drying) will allow water to quickly drain away from the hay. Bales should be oriented up and down the slope so that they will not create a dam for surface water and placed near the tip of the slope to minimize the amount of water flowing around the hay.

