



need for the winter season. Because most beef producers use hay in the form of a large round bale, it is difficult to limit hay losses. Choose a winter feeding method that will minimize losses such as a cone, a ring or a trailer. Round bale feeders reduce hay waste; the amount of reduction will vary by type. Losses with these type of systems could range from 2 to 10% while feeding on the ground could have losses greater than 40%.



The cow winter feeding program is based on feeding hay, an enterprise that could be very costly. One of the best ways to estimate the profitability of your winter feeding system is by estimating and budgeting your hay needs. All informed decisions start with information or data. Since weather is a very unpredictable factor in any agricultural enterprise, it is recommended to budget at least 25 to 50% above the current hay needs. This extra hay will depend on what winter grazing systems are in place. Either if the hay is home grown or bought, producing or buying good quality hay that is well-stored, will help to reduce the projected hay inventory. Many producers believe that the only way to make money raising cows or to make more money is to increase income. Lowering production costs is probably a more realistic way to increase the net income from a livestock enterprise. This can be done by lowering expenses or increasing productivity. That means feeding hay more efficiently.

This simple discussion was intended to spark the process of asking questions about how you perceive the true cost of hay used on feeding the cow herd. Consider pushing the pencil or working the keyboard to calculate your own costs of feeding hay and to begin considering alternatives that save money and reduce hay costs by storing hay properly, feeding efficiently and feeding good quality hay. An online **HAY CALCULATOR** is available in the MSU Extension Forage website at <http://mississippiforages.com> (Publication 2590). Choose the feeding system that meets the livestock's needs at the lowest costs.

Work with your local County Extension Office to develop a winter hay feeding program and build your inventory. There is no right or wrong decision when feeding hay; the real wrong thing is **NOT** making a decision and taking the steps to reduce cost. Reducing feeding and other costs where possible is an appropriate strategy to improve the profitability of beef production, but underfeeding animals is not a recommended way to reduce cost.

Nutrient requirements are oftentimes not a fun thing to think about regarding our herds; however, having an understanding of these requirements is paramount to successfully feeding hay. In many instances, producers focus on quantity rather than quality. Having a surplus of bales that are low in CP and TDN will not help any if the herd is in peak lactation (when CP and TDN needs are greatest). That is why it is so critical to be aware of the quality of hay fed.

