

How Much Does Your Hay Cost?

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Hay for winter feeding is an important cost in maintaining beef cows. For Coastal bermudagrass, when all expenses for fertilizer, cutting, baling, and prorated cost of establishment are included, a ton of hay costs around \$50. These costs are not too different for other kinds of grass hay. Unfortunately, the production cost of hay is not the real cost of hay as fed in Georgia. Most grass hay is put up in large round bales and stored outside on the ground. The losses in dry matter are large, and additional losses are incurred from animal refusal of spoiled hay. It is useful to examine the results of an experiment in Louisiana where large round bales of ryegrass hay were stored in different ways for seven months and then fed to cattle.

Results of this Louisiana study show the total losses of storing round bales of ryegrass on the ground were well over 50% as compared to almost none when stored in a pole barn. Storing bales outside on a rack, tires, or gravel helped reduce losses but nothing like plastic covers and especially under cover in a barn. Losses from storage of bermudagrass and tall fescue round bales outside on the ground will be somewhat lower than ryegrass but will likely equal or exceed 50%.

Thus, if hay costs \$50 per ton to produce with storage losses of 50%, the cost of hay consumed by cattle rises to \$100 per ton. This adds considerably to beef cow maintenance costs and steals potential profits. Can you afford feeding such expensive hay?

With hay storage losses of this magnitude, construction of a simple pole barn is an attractive option. A pole barn can

be constructed for about \$4 per square foot. With the savings from reduced storage losses, it is possible to pay for a pole barn in just a few years. Many Georgia beef producers have decided their hay costs were too high and have constructed pole barns to reduce their storage losses. Storage of hay bales under cover offers the opportunity of substantially reducing costs of beef cow-calf production.

Method of hay storage	Losses		
	Handling and storage	Animal refusal %	Total
On the ground	43	23	66
On gravel	32	17	49
On tires	37	6	43
On a wooden rack	31	7	38
On a wooden rack with plastic covers	12	2	14
In a pole barn	2	1	3

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