

Fodder Conservation - Hay

Climate variability and drought are normal features of the Australian environment. This is a harsh yet true reality for most farming areas of Australia.

Why conserve feed?

In Australia there are often times when available feed supply is severely reduced due to long periods of little or no rain. These drier periods may be either predicted seasonal patterns, or unpredicted (i.e. droughts).

An example of a predicted dry period is the normal weather and rainfall pattern in Southern Australia, which experiences relatively dry summers and wet winters. In many parts of Australia there may be regular autumn feed shortfalls, particularly for feed of high quality.

Short-term fodder conservation can play an important role in helping to fill these regular feed gaps and boost livestock production.

It is difficult to plan for a prolonged dry period, or droughts. Some planning methods used for such times include:

- Building up reserves of conserved fodder
- Storing grain
- Putting aside cash reserves specifically for buying fodder and grain as the need arises

Each of these methods has merit and should be considered in light of the needs and the situation at hand. Considerations include the

availability of fodder and grain, storage space and options for stock agistment.

When favourable summer season occurs, the potential productivity from annual summer forage crops is enormous. However, unless sufficient stock is on hand, substantial feed wastage will result. Excess feed could be ideal to conserve as hay. Well made hay, stored under good conditions, will last for many years.

Choosing a crop for making hay

While many crops, such as lucerne, oats and various types of pasture, are suitable for making hay the discussion in this section will be largely limited to forage sorghum.

One of the key factors in deciding what to grow for hay making, is the general agronomy suitability of the crop. It is important to choose a crop and variety that suit the situation.

The next consideration is what quantity and quality of hay are required and what type of stock will the hay be fed to. For example, if hay is to be made to provide very high-quality soft fodder to feed weaners, a good choice may be to sow Superdan 2 and cut it when the crop is around 1.2 metres high.

The fine stems and high yield potential of Superdan 2 make it a good choice in many situations. Table 1 provides yield and protect data on Superdan 2 at two cutting heights.

TABLE 1: Yield and crude protein for Superdan cut for hay when 1.2 or 2 metres high. Data is from Pacific Seeds trials conducted in Southern East Queensland over a number of years. Hay yields are from one cutting and have been adjusted to 15% moisture.

	Superdan cut at 1.2m		Superdan cut at 2.0m	
	Hay yield (t/ha)	Crude protein (%)	Hay yield (t/ha)	Crude protein (%)
Dryland	3.2	17	5.5	12
Irrigated	6.9	17	10.6	12

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