

New Hay Quality Guidelines

By Dennis Cash and Paul Dixon, MSU Extension Service (dcash@montana.edu)

Hay quality standards have been revised by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. These new guidelines go into effect January 1, 2003, and are used by the Market News reporting program. This will hopefully conform nationwide hay price information, and improve confidence by hay buyers and sellers in the US. The revised guidelines include previously-used laboratory parameters, and specific physical descriptions and intended uses. While most Montana beef cattle only require “fair” or “good” quality alfalfa hay, these new guidelines are very useful for domestic or export dairy hay markets.

Alfalfa Hay (<10% grass, 100% Dry Basis)

	% Acid Detergent Fiber (ADF)	% Neutral Detergent Fiber (NDF)	Relative Feed Value (RFV)	% Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN)	% Crude Protein (CP)
Supreme	<27	<34	>185	>62	>22
Premium	27 - 29	34 - 36	170 - 185	60 - 62	20 - 22
Good	29 - 32	36 - 40	150 - 170	58 - 60	18 - 20
Fair	32 - 35	40 - 44	130 - 150	56 - 58	16 - 18
Utility	>35	>44	<130	<56	<16

Grass Hay (100% Dry Basis)

	% Crude Protein (CP)
Premium	>13
Good	9 – 13
Fair	5 – 9
Low	<5

Physical Descriptions:

- **Supreme:** very early maturity (pre-bloom), soft fine-stemmed, extra leafy. Excellent green color and no damage.
- **Premium:** early maturity – pre-bloom in legumes or pre-head in grasses; extra leafy and fine-stemmed. Green and free of damage.
- **Good:** early to average maturity – early to mid-bloom in legumes or early headed grasses; leafy, fine to medium-stemmed, free of damage other than slight discoloration.
- **Fair:** late maturity – mid to late-bloom in legumes or headed grasses; moderate or less in leaf content, generally coarse-stemmed, with slight damage.
- **Utility:** very late maturity such as mature seed pods in legumes or mature grass heads; coarse stems. This category may include hay discounted due to excessive damage, mold or weed content. (Defects will be identified in the market report for this category).