

## USDA Ag Marketing Service Hay Quality Guidelines

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service has adopted hay quality designations for use in the nationwide Market News reporting program. These revised guidelines establish specific objective measurements of value attributes for each quality category of alfalfa and grass hay.

Nationwide uniformity of price information is the goal of establishing these new quality designations. It is important for hay buyers in California reading Market News price reports about alfalfa in Kansas to know what the quality is of the hay described in that report issued half a continent away.

Market News reporters from five states formed the task force that collected information and input from hay and forage industry representatives that went into the revised quality designation descriptions. USDA and State Department of Agriculture MARKET NEWS reporters are now using the revised guidelines in market reporting across the country.

Following are the revised national hay test guidelines on Alfalfa, Alfalfa/Mix Hay, and Grass Hay. Reporters use the test measurement most prominent in their trade area, along with visual characteristics to determine hay quality.

Table 1: Alfalfa - Alfalfa/Mix Hay testing guidelines

Quality Designation	Relative Feed Value RFV*	Acid Detergent Fiber ADF
Supreme	Over 180	Under 27
Premium	150-180	27-30
Good	125-150	30-32
Fair	100-125	32-35
Low	Under 100	Over 35

Quantitative factors are approximate, and many factors can affect feeding value. Based on 100% dry matter. \*Calculated value based on American Forage and Grasslands Council formula.

Table 2: Grass Hay testing guidelines

Quality Designation	Percent Crude Protein (CP)
Premium	Over 13
Good	9-13
Fair	5-9
Low	Under 5

Quantitative factors are approximate, and many factors can affect feeding value. Based on 100% dry matter. End usage may influence hay price or value more than testing results.

Revised Hay Quality Designations:

Supreme: Very early maturity, pre-bloom, soft fine stemmed, extra leafy. Factors indicative of very high nutritive content. Hay is excellent color and free of damage.

Premium: Early maturity, i.e., pre-bloom in legumes and pre-head in grass hays, extra leafy and fine stemmed-factors indicative of a high nutritive content. Hay is green and free of damage.

Good: Early to average maturity, i.e., early to mid-bloom in legumes and early head in grass hays, leafy, fine to medium stemmed, free of damage other than slight discoloration.

Fair: Late maturity, i.e., mid to late-bloom in legumes, head-in grass hays, moderate or below leaf content, and generally coarse stemmed. Hay may show light damage.

Low: Hay in very late maturity, such as mature seed pods in legumes or mature head in grass hays, coarse stemmed. This category could include hay discounted due to excessive damage and heavy weed content or mold. Defects will be identified in market reports when using this category.