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## **How to cope with low-quality forage on your dairy**

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First crop hay was cut late in many cases and much of the hay was rained on after it was cut. Coping with low-quality forage is a major challenge facing many dairy producers.

Nutrition advisors and dairy producers should consider the following suggestions regarding the feeding of low-quality haycrop silage:

1. Test first-crop forage to assess its crude protein, bypass protein, and energy content.

A forage test developed by the University of Wisconsin to assess the bypass protein content of legume forages is available at some testing labs. Forage protein content and degradability and energy content tend to decline as maturity advances.

2. Based on forage test results, adjust the level and source of protein supplementation in the diet.

3. Based on forage test results, increase the amount of grain fed to adjust ration fiber and energy as needed. Add a buffer to the ration when feeding higher levels of grain. Consider feeding yeast culture.

4. Dilute low-quality haycrop silage with higher energy corn silage if available.

5. Dilute low-quality haycrop silage with whole cottonseed up to 6 lb. per cow per day.

6. Dilute low-quality haycrop silage with higher quality haycrop silage from later cuttings if available.

7. Target poor quality forages to low producing cows, dry cows, and replacement heifers.

8. Fine grind corn to increase energy availability.

9. If body condition is a problem, increase supplemental fat in the ration when possible.

10. Evaluate mold/mycotoxin levels and dilute, discard or redirect affected forages as needed.

Fortunately, commodity grain and protein prices are relatively low. Therefore, these ration adjustments can be both practical and affordable.