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### What's Your CRP Forage Worth?

One of the first “big kid” farm projects my Dad turned me loose on by myself, was seeding down the marginal farm ground our family has owned for a century. Driving that M Farmall back and forth spreading brome seed for a new concept called the Conservation Reserve Program - CRP, made a second grader feel like big stuff in the mid-1980s. I'll not claim to be all knowing on this program and defer to FSA for a definition and rules.

CRP is a land conservation program administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. The long-term goal of the program is to re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat.

Signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1985, CRP is one of the largest private-lands conservation programs in the United States. Thanks to voluntary participation by farmers and landowners, CRP has achieved significant goals in conservation and sustainability.

As I write this, all three counties of Meadowlark District (*honestly - most of the state*) falls under the declaration for emergency haying and grazing of CRP acres. It obviously is getting late in the year to be putting up hay, but every year there seems to be CRP acres available for haying/grazing and especially this year, nearly everyone is utilizing forages of any kind to get livestock through the winter. Meadowlark District has a rich history with the CRP program and I know these acres still exist.

All CRP forage is not created equally, as there runs a gamete of mixes of grasses and forbs - mostly our native Kansas grasses, but not always. Not only is the composition of forage at play, so is the timing of harvest. Generally, this type of hay is put up later, due primarily to the designated nesting season restriction, and often times of drought stress come later in the growing season. Additionally, CRP forage typically is not harvested in consecutive years, so this type of hay can contain old growth forage from previous years. All of this is to say that regardless if CRP is put up for hay or grazed, this is not the kind of forage that brings a premium, based on quality. Most often this forage is compared to corn residue or wheat straw in terms of quality, but is it???

Hopefully this all makes sense thus far and I've not grossly misstated something so badly as to receive a call from the FSA office! So, why in the world have I invested this much time and newspaper space to this topic? First, as stated earlier, this is a year where CRP hay might be incorporated into rations more often and more widespread than a “normal” year. What kind of values should be plugged into a ration balancing software? The best answer is to complete a good, representative forage test and go from there with actual forage numbers. This low-quality forage will need to be supplemented, but at what rate? The second reason is a call for action.

K-State Research and Extension has a new beef cow-calf Extension specialist - Dr. Jason Warner. Dr. Warner is organizing a statewide project to measure the forage quality value of CRP forages in Kansas and I've committed to providing testing locations in the northeast part of the state. What I don't know is who might be willing to serve as cooperators on this project? Full details are forthcoming and I'll be happy to visit with anyone with interest, but basically, I just need to identify 2-3 sites across the District where representative clippings can be taken throughout the growing season. Please contact me if you want to help with this important study. 785-336-2184 or [rmostell@ksu.edu](mailto:rmostell@ksu.edu)