



Cut Back on Hay Costs During Winter Feeding

Innovative hay bale feeders eliminate the waste inherent in traditional hay rings.

Freddie Davis, a rancher-farmer in Royse City, Texas, faced a problem common to many. “I wasn’t going to have enough hay to make it through the winter. I was going to have to buy about \$6,000 worth of hay to make up the shortfall,” he says.

Like many ranchers who have found themselves squeezed in recent years by outside forces — from drought and a weak economy to rising oil and grain prices — Davis, who owns 75 head of mixed-breed cattle, wanted better control of his input costs, especially the hay his cows wasted eating from traditional hay rings each winter.

The problem with a hay ring is that cattle stand outside the feeder, tear the hay out and let the excess fall from their mouths. When cattle bite off too much, as they are inclined to do, the waste falls to the ground, gets trampled and otherwise damaged — and will not be eaten.

Davis found a solution in a new type of square hay bale feeder designed to keep cows from tearing out the hay and wasting it.

“A square hay bale feeder has metal bars that cows must stick their heads through to get to the hay bale inside,” explains Bob Studebaker, owner of GoBob Pipe and Steel, an innovative farm

supplier that first introduced its original Hay Conservator square hay bale feeder to the market about six years ago. “With the hay bale inside, cows have to commit their heads inside and stay there while they eat. They won’t go in, get a bite and back out. They stay in the feeder, so anything that drops out of their mouths stays in the feeder, which they eat later.”

“When I called Bob of GoBob, I bought his Hay Conservator with a 30-day guaranty that I’d use at least 25% less hay,” says Davis. “It worked, so I bought a few more. When they made my hay last that first winter, they quickly paid for themselves. Since then, I’ve cut my hay consumption by a third each winter.”

Since Davis’ cows waste much less hay in winter, he finds himself making fewer trips to the barn and pasture to put out hay bales. “I’m saving a couple hours a week each winter putting out less hay because the cows waste less,” says Davis. “It lets me get to everything else that needs to be done that much faster.”

About five years after buying his square hay bale feeders, Davis says, “They’re still holding up well and have years of life left in them.”

John Rummel and his wife, who run a 250-acre ranch with 70 cows in Ash Grove, Mo., were also tired of the hay wasted by traditional hay rings. In fact, they even had difficulty getting their big 5 foot by 6 foot bales to fit in their hay rings, which typically left “at least two feet of bale sticking out of the top.” The cows would eat out under the hay bale, and big chunks of bale would fall out of the ring and get trampled, making a mess, according to Rummel.

“When my wife found what looked like half a hay bale lying on the ground, she got so upset she said, ‘We’ve got to do something,’” says Rummel. “What made it worse is that our cows were wasting about a third of the clean barn-kept hay we gave them.”

While there’s an ample supply of square hay bale feeders on the market today, not all are created equal.

Rummel says some of the square hay bale feeders he’s looked at would be hard to fit his big 5 foot x 6 foot bales in. “If the feeder is too small, the cows may not be able to fit their heads inside,” says Rummel. “If it’s too tight, they’d pull their heads out along with the hay and drop it outside where it’d go to waste.”

Some square hay bale feeders, in fact, are as small as 6 foot by 6 foot at the top, which would be a tight squeeze for a big bale. Others use thinner gauge pipe, which may not be built to

withstand years of hungry, pushy cows or harsh winter weather. Some, however, like GoBob’s newest feeders, guarantee that animals won’t tear them up, are tested to hold over 15,000 lb., have up to a 10-year warranty and even guarantee up to 30% hay savings.

At the time, however, Rummel was more than pleased when he bought several square hay bale feeders from GoBob.

“When my cows reach their heads in to feed, their heads stay in and they clean up all the hay,” says Rummel. “They just don’t waste hay, so I can put out about 30 to 35% less.” While Rummel typically put out bales in his hay ring every day with his tractor, he finds he can now put them out about every other day in his square hay bale feeders. “I’m saving time, money and gas because I don’t have to restock the bales so often,” he says. “I can stay warm in the house on cold winter days and in bad weather. It makes things easier when I don’t have to feed them so much.”

Since the cows are not tearing out and trampling his clean, barn-kept hay, it stays nice and fresh where they can get at it whenever they want. “The cows just go to the square bale Hay Conservators. They work so well I got rid of my hay rings.”

As market uncertainty leads many ranchers, dairy farmers and even farm equipment dealers to control input costs, the growing popularity of square hay bale feeders has proven there’s a market for conserving hay. But as circumstances change, the market and design of square hay bale feeders cannot stand still.

Studebaker explains, “We were one of the first to offer a hay-conserving feeder and the first to offer a square-shaped feeder for round bales. We were the first to offer a 25% hay-savings guarantee. But that’s not enough. Like the ranchers, dairy farmers and others we serve, we have to innovate and keep improving the tools they use.”

With an improved design, GoBob now guarantees 30% hay savings on its latest square bale Hay Conservators. The company also offers double bale, along with larger, stronger versions for bulls and horned cattle. New skid corners also allow them to be dragged almost anywhere.

GoBob Pipe and Steel offers a complete selection of feeders, fencing, pipe and guards, as well as flatbeds and hay trailers — all designed to provide farmers with a top quality product that saves them money by helping them work better and more efficiently. For more information, call 1-877-851-2365 or visit www.gobobpipe.com. **HW**

