

## Feeding Round Hay Bales, Plan “B”

It seems that Sue and I have become a bit poorer, because we are mule and horse richer. Hay and fuel related prices have not added any shekels to our purse. To deal with this issue, we scouted around to find the best source of reasonably priced quality hay.

This turned out to be 500# to 700# round bales. At first we did not have a flatbed trailer or a tractor that could safely lift and handle this load, so we had to be inventive. To get more than one pick-up load home at a time, we would load them into our four horse trailer and winch them out with a come-along. Once on the ground, we would roll them into the barn by hand, the system worked ok, but required more time and a goodly amount of Norwegian steam. As the number of hungry mouths increased in the barn, we began to tool up better for this chore. This included a flat-bed car trailer, to haul in more big bales and to facilitate their unloading, a larger tractor with a bucket mounted spear to lift and move them.

The price of putting up hay is directly related to the cost of baling and handling. If the farmer can cut his time and cost, that is what he will do! Most hay is put up for cows and considered, by some horse or mule owners, to be below the quality for their charges. We have found the opposite. We believe that our mules and easy keeping horses do not need a very rich feed. They are all very healthy, in good flesh and have been fed on round baled hay for about the last seven years.

We treat a round bale as if it was loose hay. Once the binding is removed, it will roll out like peeling an onion. We then will fork it into the individual feeders in the barn or if a bit dusty, we will lay it out on the matted barn floor and dampen it prior to loading the feeders, (Note: round bales get a bit more dust in them, because of the way they are put up, spinning close to the ground). The bales

can also be handled vertically, with less rolling around, as shown in the photo below.



A spin off advantage from this method of feeding, verses tossing flakes of hay into a feeder is that you can see exactly what you are feeding. One would be surprised what can be hidden inside a flake of hay. We have found wire, dead snakes, dead birds, sticks and in one case a deflated giant balloon. Mildew normally will stick to the sides of a hay bale and it does not matter if it is square or round. A round bale has less outside surface than the number of square bales within its' total volume. This means that there is less surface to attract mildew.

We have had great success feeding round bales loose. Hopefully, this information will help you cut the hay cost, for the feeding of your mules and horses.

Ed Haefliger

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