

Hay Storage Methods

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Beef producers can pay for a barn to store round bales quicker than they might think. Stacking hay in a barn rather than outside can save 30 percent of their hay crop. For instance, if you build a 36 x 50 foot barn, it will store 170 5 by 6-foot rolls of hay. What is hay worth? My opinion is, with most any hay, you will have \$30 a roll in it by the time you get it in the barn. At this price, on 170 rolls, you will save \$9 per roll or \$1,530 on the 170 rolls in the barn.

If you build your own barn, enclosed on three sides, you will spend \$3-4 per square foot. The contract price for this barn would be about \$6 per square foot. If you build your own barn at this cost of \$3-4 per square foot, you can pay for it in four to six years. If you contract it at \$6 per square foot, you will pay out in seven to nine year at 8 percent interest.

Tarps or plastic as a cover stacked outside with gravel or pallets under it will cut waste down to 12 to 14 percent waste. A tarp to cover 60 rolls of hay costs \$260 or \$4.33 per roll. If it only lasts one year, you have about broke even, but if you use it two years, then you have saved \$2 per roll. If it lasts four years, your savings would be \$3 per roll.

I want to explain to everyone that tarps are labor intensive, getting them covered as well as taking care of the tarp as you feed. You need to use ropes to hold the tarp down securely or the wind will ruin the tarp.

If you don't get the hay up off the ground you will have even more loss. You should use gravel, pallets, old tires or something to keep the hay off the ground.

My experience with net wrap is that they will help save some of the hay on the top of the bale, but if you store it on the ground, the loss at the bottom is the same. The cost is over double the price of twine, but it does speed up time in the field when rolling hay.

My summary of all this is if you produce hay and need to store it for six months and plan to be in business for at least ten year, you can pay for a hay barn regardless of what other storing methods you use.