Loose Hay Drying System Produces "Best" Quality Bales

Intense humidity and not enough rain-free days in succession make it difficult to put up quality hay in Ontario, says Lars Steunebrink. So, instead of counting on Mother Nature, hay for his dairy goats dries inside a specially designed building with Austrian hay-drying equipment.

He and his wife, Ingrid, started their goat dairy in 2016, and quality hay was a priority for animal health and higher milk production.

"We didn't want silage that can mold and cause listeria. And we want longevity out of our goats and less trouble with health issues," Steunebrink says. After traveling to Germany and talking to producers, he purchased the hay-drying system.

Instead of leaving cut hay on the fields for 4 or 5 days to dry, it's picked up after just a day or two at about 35 percent moisture with a self-loading wagon and hauled to the couple's 10,800-sq. ft. building, of which more than half is used as drying space. The wagon is pulled into the drive-through at one end of the building. Hay is picked up with a grapple mounted on a crane with a cab for the operator that travels on rails in the shed's roof. The hay is dropped into one of two drying boxes with wire mesh floors.

The building is designed to bring air from the top through a dehumidifier with two registers. The first cools the air to remove moisture. The heat taken from the air goes to the second register to be put back into the air that was just dried to create warm, dry air that goes through a fan blowing under the hay.

Hay can be stacked out of the field (wet) to about 20 ft. and dries in 3 to 5 days. If necessary, it can be loosened up with the grapple. The two boxes total about 6,240 sq. ft. Steunebrink cuts all of his 225 acres of hay in May for his first cutting. After that is dried and baled out of the box, he has room for future cuttings. Bales are stored in a separate building.

There's enough room in the drying boxes to hold all the hay from the following 3 or 4 cuttings. Between cuttings, dry hay is removed with the grapple to use as feed dropped in a forage box, or baled to store or sell.

Steunebrink has made small bales, but prefers 3 by 4-ft. bales for ease of handling. Most of the time, the goats are fed loose hay right from the boxes.

"The hay you get is as bright as you can imagine. It's green as grass. We can't make that around here, especially not with young nutrient-rich grass. For us it's a huge quality difference," Steunebrink says. "Plus, I can feed less grain."

Operational cost is 1/2-cent/lb. of hay for electricity. The initial cost was substantial, but Steunebrink notes they were starting from scratch and setting up silage bunks is costly, too.

"This is easier to work with," he says, noting he gets the hay from inside, not outside from a cold, snowy bunk. "I've been more than happy with it."

Besides working well with grass hay for his 1,200 dairy goat operation, he adds that the drying system works well for alfalfa and alfalfa mixes. Besides hay the system works for drying hops and herbs.

Steunebrink is so impressed with the system that he became the North American distributor for the company. He invites people to contact him for more information.

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Wet hay is hauled from the field to a specially designed building with drying space, where it's picked up by a grapple that travels on rails. Crane has a cab for the operator.

Hay is dropped into one of 2 drying boxes with wire mesh floors. A fan blows warm, dry air under hay to dry it. Once it's dry, hay is baled as shown at right.

Business Is Booming For Dairy Salvage Company

If you need stainless steel vats or cooling equipment, Dallas Schweitz of Salvage House probably has it. He and his wife Suzanne travel from Florida to California to find unused dairy equipment ready for repurposing.

"There is an abundance of used dairy equipment on the market," says Schweitz. "We sell a lot of used tanks for all sorts of uses, like craft breweries and wineries. Anybody who needs food-grade handling equipment can use them."

He describes one customer who was going to make bubble gum and another who was making medicine for horse hooves. The petroleum industry uses them to make a chemical to flush out pipelines.

Other uses include honey, maple syrup and molasses storage. People buy them for chilling chickens after scalding for feather removal. Others buy them for vegetable cooling.

"A lot of people are hesitant to tell us when they are doing something unusual," says Schweitz.

Tanks can be as large as a 20,000-gal. vertical silos or a 14,000-gal. horizontal tank.

"We also get a lot of small bulk tanks," says Schweitz. "They are real popular with boutique organic dairies making cheese or selling milk locally. Goat dairies also like them, and they have come on strong in recent years."

Milk chillers are another common item at the Salvage House salvage yard. Schweitz has sold them to vegetable growers in California and even to a concrete plant. The plant used cold water to slow the concrete-making process.

"If someone has a need, we can help," he says. "If it's too technical, we will refer them to a thermal engineer to set up the right system."

Gensets are another common item at Salvage House. However, they are part of a wide array of items that are constantly changing. "Our expertise lies in cooling tanks, chillers, plate chillers and milking equipment, but we sometimes have a pile of thermal equipment such as fans," says Schweitz. "In the past we have salvaged manure separation equipment and even tractors."

The inventory is constantly changing. Schweitz can be in a dairy scheduled to be demolished and cleared away. He has agreed on a price with the seller. Then he is told, "If you see anything else you want, take it. In 2 weeks all of this will be gone."

"Sometimes I have to remember that I only have so much storage space, and shipping to Illinois from the East and West coasts is expensive," says Schweitz.

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"Half Round" Insert Revolutionizes Hoof Care

AIM Half Rounds are like orthopedics for horses, says Sterling Berry, who co-created and markets them for the business she owns with her mother and co-founder, Midge Berry.

Made of the same polyurethane used in orthopedic shoe inserts for people, Midge Berry came up with the half round shape. It fits inside the horseshoe and is secured with a self-adhering bandage.

"It has a Durometer measurement of Shore 00 of 25, so it's very soft, like a gummy bear," Sterling Berry says. The polyurethane product absorbs impact, has breathability and is reusable.

With the flat side against the hoof, an AIM Half Round puts pressure on the frog and sole to increase blood flow while allowing the horse to shift its weight off a bruise, abscess or sore area of the foot.

"The half rounds should only be used when the horse is stabled, because they are soft and will break up," Berry says. "People put them on their horses after competition or anytime a horse needs relief for its feet."

About 2 1/2 in. thick at the center point, the half round is designed to last through one shoe cycle. They sell in pairs in 3 sizes (3, 4 and 5-in.) for between $125 and $145 through the AIM Equine website. The cost is less than hoof packing, which is also more labor intensive, Berry notes.

When the horse is stabled, slip the half round inside the shoe and wrap it. Remove the half round the next morning before letting the horse out.

The U.S.-made product is shelf stable to keep handy for emergencies. Veterinarians and farriers use it for horses with laminitis and other ailments, Berry says.

Made of polyurethane, "Half Round" insert fits inside horseshoe and is secured with a self-adhering bandage.

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