

Canola Hay

Fact Sheet



Canola crops that have been damaged due to frost don't have to be a complete write-off! Making hay out of damaged grain crops is an opportunity to recoup costs but it's essential that you understand what you're getting into.

Frosted canola crops can be cut for hay, especially in the harder years. Being a high-input crop, farmers are motivated to get a return or at least to recover some costs. Making hay can be a great way to do that, but there are also pitfalls. We have been assisting farmers in making, testing, marketing, transporting and feeding canola hay for many years. This fact sheet shares some of the things we've learned.

Hay or Grain?

Should you still harvest grain with an expected reduced yield, or should you make hay? We have developed some resources to assist you in making this decision.

1. [Tips for a Profitable Hay Season Guide](#) is a comprehensive resource for making hay.
2. [Hay v Grain Calculator](#) will help you estimate hay and grain yields, as well as your potential gross margin.

Touch base with your local agronomist for expert advice for your region. They will be critical in helping you through the decision-making process.

Key considerations

- **Chemical Withholding:** Confirm any chemical applications are outside of the withholding periods prior to cutting.
- **GMO or Non-GMO:** Some buyers won't purchase GM crops and when listing your hay, you will be asked if your crop is GMO free. Accurate declaration is critical in many markets.
- **Storage:** The optimal solution is for the hay to be stored in a shed. Selling hay straight off the paddock can be difficult and will see the quality of the hay deteriorate the longer it sits outside.
- **Contractors:** Consider their equipment when choosing a hay contractor. For some tips on finding the hay contractor, download our [Tips for a Profitable Hay Season Guide](#).

Market Potential

We've seen all livestock, excluding horses, thrive on canola hay. However, there are some obstacles to selling canola hay that are important to consider.

- **Appearance:** Canola hay does not have the appearance of traditional attractive feed like cereal, pasture or lucerne.
- **Smell:** As a brassica (cabbage family) canola hay, when baled, can have the unpleasant aroma of rotting cabbage. This can be off-putting for livestock and buyers.
- **Tainting Flavour:** There is a perception that when fed to cows canola hay can taint the flavour of milk or meat. This perception makes it unsaleable to the dairy and feedlot industries.
- **Local Use:** Canola hay is popular for on-farm use and will often sell between neighbours. This allows buyers to take a test bale to see how their livestock adjust to it before buying a larger quantity. During droughts canola hay will move vast distances but it is not the norm.
- **Nitrates:** Canola hay poses a greater risk of high nitrates than most types of hay. High levels can be harmful to livestock, which is why we nitrate test all canola hay prior to sale. At Feed Central we have two options for nitrate testing available.
 - i. [On-Farm Test Kit](#) will determine if nitrates are present or not in your crop.
 - ii. [In-Lab Nitrate Level Test](#) will provide a specific reading of the levels in your hay, which will help determine if it's safe for livestock.

[Download our Nitrate Fact Sheet for more information.](#)



Understanding Canola Hay Quality

Canola hay is notoriously variable in quality, which is why testing is essential before feeding it to livestock. The variation in the feed test results (and visual results) is directly correlated to the maturity of the crop at cutting. The flowering stage yields higher protein and energy results in direct correlation to leaf retention.

The following table shows the average quality results for canola hay samples tested in the Feed Central lab.

ME (MJ/kg)	8.2 – 10.3
CP%	11.2 – 19.3
NDF%	36.0 – 53.7
ADF%	29.6 – 43.8

Having your hay feed tested and nitrate tested with Feed Central will provide you with our Quality Certificate. This will help you receive the best price for your hay in the current market. All canola hay inspected through Feed Central will be tested for nitrate levels to ensure that it is safe for livestock consumption. This will give you peace of mind, although you may choose to sell or use your hay however you wish.

At Feed Central, we are committed to sharing our expertise and experience to help you navigate these decisions.

For further information or to discuss our services, feel free to reach out.

Tips for Making Canola Hay

If you do decide to move forward with making canola hay, here are some tips:

- **Timing is Key:** Cut the canola when it is in full flower to early podding. This ensures a good leaf-to-flower-to-stem ratio, resulting in higher-quality hay and a better feed test result.
- **Condition Well:** Conditioning properly will help crack the stems of the canola, helping the hay to cure quickly. Monitor the performance of the conditioner, and slow down or adjust it as needed to ensure maximum conditioning. Canola hay generally has a thicker stalk and good conditioning reduces drying time, improving the quality and reducing the potential for internal bale spoilage or self-combustion.
- **Minimise Raking:** Once cut, minimise raking and rake with care to avoid breaking up the leaf and stems. During the raking process, it's important to retain a good leaf-to-stem ratio to ensure that the leaf makes it into the bale and improves the quality of the hay.
- **Bale Weight:** Heavy bales increase the efficiency of on-farm handling and storage, in particular, the time it takes to remove the hay from the paddock. It also maximises truck weights, which increases the distance the product can be transported, thus increasing your market reach. Newer high-density balers can make bales in excess of 600kg.

Disclaimer: Feed Central has prepared this content based on our own industry experience. This content should not be considered complete or expert advice. We encourage you to talk to your agronomist, do your own research and make your own decisions. Feed Central Pty Ltd will not be held responsible for decisions made and actions taken as a result of information in this fact sheet.