

National
Edition



Tips for a
Profitable Hay Season

PLANTING GUIDE

2026/2027 SEASON

Winter Hay Production in Australia

From Planning to Dowing, Maximise Yield and Quality with Seasonal Strategies.

Each season brings a new set of challenges for hay growers. Seasonal conditions, input costs, paddock history and market demand all play a role in determining what to plant and how to manage it. The aim of this guide is to bring together practical information that helps growers make confident decisions well before the seed goes in the ground.

The Feed Central Planting Guide for the 2026/27 season outlines the key considerations for producing winter hay crops in Australian conditions. It includes a seasonal production timeline, paddock and species selection guidance, weed and stubble management strategies, and practical notes on fertiliser and lodging risk. The guide is designed to support growers who are planning hay-focused paddocks, as well as those who want to retain the flexibility to switch between grain and hay depending on seasonal conditions.

Whether you are reviewing paddock rotations, selecting varieties, or refining your fertiliser and weed management strategy, the goal of this guide is simple: to help you set your crops up for reliable establishment, strong biomass production and quality hay that meets market expectations.

Feed Central has worked alongside growers and hay buyers for more than two decades, and the insights in this guide draw on both research and practical experience from across the industry. We hope it provides a useful reference as you plan for the coming season.

For more information please reach out to me on [0477_024_999](tel:0477024999).



Stephen Page
GROWER SERVICES
MANAGER, FEED CENTRAL

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Adding Value to Buyers & Sellers

A Note From Tim

2025 marked a year of much growth and change for our business. Feed Central, LocalAg and LocalAg Plus are now working together seamlessly and we're getting great feedback from buyers, sellers, growers and producers.

Together, these services help lift standards, reduce risk and strengthen trust across the hay supply chain.



Tim

Tim Ford
MANAGING DIRECTOR
FEED CENTRAL

How Feed Central, LocalAg and LocalAg Plus Work Together

Feed Central, LocalAg and LocalAg Plus operate as an integrated system supporting the hay industry from production through to sale. Each plays a different role.

Feed Central – Quality Assurance

Feed Central focuses on independent quality assurance services that help growers demonstrate the value of their hay and provide buyers with confidence in what they are purchasing.

- Independent hay testing and feed analysis
- Accredited inspection and quality assurance programs
- Memberships that support growers, contractors and industry specialists
- Industry education and technical support for hay producers and buyers

LocalAg Marketplace – Direct Buying and Selling

LocalAg is the online marketplace, fully owned and operated by Feed Central, designed specifically for buying and selling hay and other agricultural products.

- National marketplace connecting buyers and sellers
- Verified users and secure payment systems
- Search functions designed around hay quality and suitability
- A platform that has been built to buy and sell hay with Feed Central Quality Assurance seamlessly integrated.

LocalAg Plus – Traditional Hay Trading Support

LocalAg Plus combines the reach of the LocalAg Marketplace with the personalised support of a dedicated sales team, focused on trading Quality Assured hay.

- Dedicated account management for buyers and sellers
- Delivered pricing and contract options
- Logistics coordination and delivery support
- Integrated with Feed Central Quality Assurance and LocalAg Marketplace



Annual Timeline for Winter Hay Production in Australia



SUMMER (DEC-FEB)

PLANNING & GROUNDWORK

Review last season's performance and plan rotations

- Assess paddocks for compaction, drainage issues, and weeds.
- Decide hay species (oats, barley, wheat, vetch, ryegrass, brassicas, triticale) based on feed goals (quality vs. bulk).
- Seed grading and testing or purchase.
- Prepare a clean, firm seedbed for good seed-to-soil contact.

Soil testing and nutrition planning

- Consult with your farm agronomist on soil tests and results to develop a plan for soil nutrition.

Clean-up and weed management

- With the support of your agronomist, assess herbicide use and/or cultivation to reduce presowing weeds.
- Develop a plan to reduce the stubble build up from previous crops.

Paddock selection

- Prioritise risk management and flexibility your paddocks to optimise feed quality outcomes.
- Paddocks with a higher frost risk are well suited to hay production, as frost-affected crops may still produce high-value hay even where grain yield potential is compromised.
- Adequate subsoil moisture at sowing is important to support reliable establishment and biomass production, particularly in seasons with a delayed break.
- If lack of moisture compromises grain yield or quality, these areas can be swapped to hay production.

Machinery check & repairs

- Service machinery - planters, sprayrigs, tractors and trucks - minimises breakdowns during sowing.

AUTUMN (MAR-MAY)

SOWING WINDOW

Timing Objectives

- Aim to sow as soon as soil moisture is adequate.
- In dry seasons, growers may resort to sowing dry. These crops will require rain for emergence.
- Ideal sowing conditions into moisture span from March to May.

Early March

- Seed purchased and on-farm ready for sowing
- Apply starter fertiliser based on soil test and agronomic advice.
- Select varieties with good disease resistance and yield potential ([consult the GRDC/NVT Winter Crop Sowing Guides for your region](#)).

Mid-Late March

- Sow cool-season hay crops like oats, annual ryegrass, triticale and brassicas (if used). Adjust depth and rate to species.
- Engage your agronomist to assess weed and pest pressure and manage with targeted control as seedlings emerge and establish.
- Start input/spray diary and collection of details for completing you CVD.

Late April - May

- Complete sowing before soil temperatures cool too much (germination slows).
- Seek your agronomist advice on top up fertiliser (especially nitrogen for bulk growth).

EARLY WINTER (JUN-JUL)

ESTABLISHMENT & SOIL MOISTURE MANAGEMENT

Monitor crop emergence and early growth

- Have your agronomist assess the germination stand with consideration for top dressing if needed.

Weed/pest control

- Seek your agronomist's advice for weed and pest pressures.
- Adhere to all herbicide label instructions and grazing withholding periods.

MIDWINTER - EARLY SPRING (AUG-SEP)

PEAK GROWTH

Fertiliser top-ups & nutrition monitoring

- Engage your agronomist for additional advice on nitrogen application in late winter/early spring to drive biomass production where required.

Growth checks

- Monitor secondary root establishment, tillering and foliage fungal pressures.
- Engage your agronomist to discuss control measures for fungal and pest pressures.

Weed control & grazing management

- Monitor weed regrowth and grazing timing if using dual-purpose crops.

Species & Paddock Alignment for Winter Hay Production

Species selection should align with paddock constraints, weed burden, frost risk and intended markets. Where hay is the primary objective, cereals that produce reliable biomass, cure well, and deliver acceptable feed tests under a range of seasonal conditions are preferred. Selecting the appropriate cereal species can also increase tolerance to frost, minimise quality losses from weed pressures, and allow strategic weed management through cutting rather than herbicide reliance.

Wheat (awned and awnless)

Wheat is well suited to dual-purpose paddocks where a late decision between hay and grain may be required. It offers strong feed test results when cut for hay, particularly in frost-affected seasons, and has the widest range of in-crop herbicide options, which can be advantageous where weed pressure is high.

Awned wheat

- Advantages:
 - Higher grain yield potential if taken through to harvest
 - Strong straw strength and biomass
 - Good feed test results in frosted or droughted seasons
- Disadvantages:
 - Awns can reduce palatability and consumption of hay, particularly for horses and dairies
 - Slightly reduced hay market appeal compared with awnless types

Awnless (beardless) wheat

- Advantages:
 - Improved palatability and animal intake
 - Preferred for premium hay markets (dairy, feedlot, equine)
 - Easier handling during feeding
- Disadvantages:
 - Generally lower grain yield potential if harvested for grain
 - Limited variety availability compared with awned wheats

Wheat suits paddocks with moderate frost risk, known weed pressure, or where chemical flexibility is required.

Barley (awned and awnless)

Barley is well-suited to hay-focused systems, particularly in late sowing or colder environments, due to rapid establishment and strong winter growth.

Awned barley

- Advantages:
 - Very high early biomass production
 - Excellent feed test performance as hay
 - Strong demand in livestock rations
- Disadvantages:
 - Awns reduce palatability and limit suitability for horses

Awnless barley

- Advantages:
 - High palatability and intake
 - Well-suited to equine, dairy and feedlot hay markets
 - Reliable establishment under cold conditions
- Disadvantages:
 - Lower grain recovery if harvested
 - Fewer herbicide options than wheat

Barley is particularly useful in paddocks with short sowing windows, cooler soils, or where fast early growth is required to reduce weed pressure.

Oats (for comparison)

Forage oats remain the benchmark cereal hay in many regions due to its reliability and ease of management.

- Advantages:
 - Highest biomass potential for hay
 - Excellent palatability
 - Tolerant of poorer seedbeds
- Disadvantages:
 - Limited in-crop weed control options
 - Less flexibility if taken through to grain

Weed Management Considerations in Hay-focused Paddocks

Hay production can be strategically used as a weed management tool, particularly in paddocks with known grass-weed issues. Cutting crops prior to weed seed set aligns with GRDC-supported Integrated Weed Management (IWM) principles and can significantly reduce seedbank replenishment without relying on additional herbicide inputs.

Advantages of using hay for weed control

- Reduces annual grass weed seed set (e.g. annual ryegrass, wild oats)
- Lowers reliance on in-crop herbicides
- Removes weed biomass from paddocks
- Supports resistance management strategies

Disadvantages and risks

- Weeds present in hay can reduce feed quality and marketability
- Risk of spreading weed seeds if cutting occurs too late
- Some weeds pose toxicity or biosecurity risks

Weed Acceptability in Hay (General Guide)

Generally acceptable at low levels (immature):

- Wild oats
- Rye grass
- Subterranean and balansa clovers

Unacceptable or high-risk weeds:

- Variegated thistle
- Spear thistle
- Paterson's curse
- Bathurst burr
- Horehound
- Heliotrope
- Wild radish
- Capeweed
- Barley grass (prior to awn development)
- Any declared noxious weeds

Paddocks with known infestations of unacceptable weeds should not be used for hay intended for sale, particularly into interstate or premium markets.

SUMMARY TABLE

Species	Hay yield	Feed Quality (Hay)	Weed Control Flexibility	Palatability	Grain Option Retained
Oats	Very High	High	Low	Excellent	Limited
Awned Wheat	Moderate-High	High	Very high	Good	Excellent
Awnless Wheat	Moderate-High	High	Very High	Very good	Limited
Awned Barley	High	High	Moderate	Good	Excellent
Awnless Barley	High	High	Moderate	Very good	Limited

Paddock Preparation: Managing Residues, Weeds and Stubble for Hay Production

Successful hay crops start long before sowing. Understanding paddock history, managing weed pressure and preparing crop residues all play an important role in establishing a productive and marketable hay crop.

A clear picture of previous chemical use, weed burden and stubble levels helps growers choose the right paddocks, avoid residue risks and maintain flexibility between hay and grain production as the season unfolds.

Chemical History Matters

A thorough review of paddock chemical history is essential. Residual herbicides such as sulfonylureas, imidazolinones and some group I products can restrict crop choice, limit hay market access or pose risks to livestock if residues persist in forage.

- Do**
- ✓ Review paddock spray history before selecting hay paddocks
 - ✓ Check withholding/residual periods for previous herbicides
 - ✓ Consider livestock residue risks if hay will be sold or fed

- Don't**
- ✗ Assume residues have broken down completely
 - ✗ Plant sensitive hay species without checking restrictions
 - ✗ Ignore potential market access issues

Hay Crops as a Weed Management Tool

Hay production can form part of an Integrated Weed Management (IWM) strategy. Cutting crops for hay prior to weed seed set can reduce the replenishment of grass and broadleaf weed seed banks.

This approach is particularly effective for annual ryegrass and wild oats when cutting timing is well managed.

- Do**
- ✓ Use hay crops strategically in paddocks with grass weed pressure
 - ✓ Cut crops before weeds reach seed set
 - ✓ Monitor paddocks early to manage weed competition

- Don't**
- ✗ Allow weeds to mature before cutting
 - ✗ Assume weeds in hay will be accepted by all buyers
 - ✗ Overlook species that may pose toxicity or biosecurity risks

Stubble and Residue Management

Surface residue management plays an important role in crop establishment, moisture conservation and hay quality.

Retained and well-distributed stubble can improve infiltration, reduce evaporation and protect soil structure. However, excessive or poorly managed residue can interfere with sowing or contaminate hay at harvest.

- Do**
- ✓ Maintain even stubble distribution across paddocks
 - ✓ Manage stubble height before sowing
 - ✓ Use residue to help conserve soil moisture

- Don't**
- ✗ Leave excessive residue that interferes with sowing
 - ✗ Allow residue to build up where it may contaminate hay
 - ✗ Ignore disease carry-over risks in heavy residue systems

Good paddock preparation supports reliable crop establishment, strong biomass production and quality hay outcomes. Reviewing chemical history, managing weeds strategically and maintaining well-managed stubble also preserves flexibility.

This allows growers to make the final decision later in the season, directing crops toward hay or grain depending on seasonal conditions, frost impacts and market signals.

Custom Made in Australia

STAINLESS STEEL HAYCORER

- Bagging attachment prevents contamination
- Efficient design for fast Hay sample collection
- Stainless steel components
- Cleanout rod to ensure complete cleanout between lots
- Stainless steel serrated tip & protective cap



Shed Ready, Season Ready

Good Shed Preparation Protects Hay Quality and Improves Logistics

As hay season approaches, attention turns to paddocks, weather and machinery. But one of the most important parts of the operation is often overlooked—the shed that will store the hay after baling.

Preparing sheds before the first bale arrives helps protect hay quality, reduce fire risk and ensure trucks can load safely and efficiently when it's time to move hay to market. A clean, dry storage environment is essential. Old hay, dust and organic debris left from previous seasons should be removed before stacking begins. This material can trap moisture, harbour mould and increase the risk of heating in stored hay.

Roof inspections are equally important. Small leaks can quickly become a major problem once thousands of bales are stacked beneath them. Broken sheets, loose screws or blocked gutters should be repaired early to prevent water entering the shed.

The shed floor should also be level, well drained and firm enough for loader operation.

Managing fire risk

Hay sheds present a significant fire risk on farms. Cleaning sheds removes loose hay, dust and chaff that can contribute to heating.

Fuel containers, machinery and chemicals should not be stored inside hay sheds, and growers should ensure fire extinguishers or water supplies are readily available nearby. Monitoring stack temperatures during the early weeks after baling is also an important precaution.

Planning for efficient loading

Good shed preparation also helps carriers and buyers when hay needs to be transported.

Large loads are often moved using B-double trucks or road trains, so sheds should have a firm, level loading area where trucks can park safely while loaders operate. Clear access inside the shed allows stacks to be reached quickly without repeatedly shifting bales.

Just as important is the route from the property entrance to the shed. Internal roads should be wide enough for trucks, free of low branches and maintained so they remain accessible in all weather conditions.

Good access reduces loading time, improves safety and helps keep transport operations running smoothly during busy periods.

Pre-Season Shed Checklist

- Remove old hay, dust and debris
- Repair roof leaks and check drainage
- Level and clean shed floors
- Remove fire hazards and check extinguishers
- Control rodents and birds
- Inspect shed structure
- Plan stack layout for airflow and loader access
- Prepare a firm and safe loading area for trucks
- Ensure clear access from property entrance to the shed

Preparing sheds before hay season takes only a small investment of time, but the benefits are significant. Clean sheds protect hay quality, safer storage reduces fire risk, and well-planned access improves logistics for trucks and loaders.

When the first bales roll off the paddock, a shed that is clean, dry and accessible helps ensure the season runs smoothly—from paddock to customer.

Adding Value & Making Your Hay Attractive to Buyers - Made Easy with Feed Central

Seed to Feed

For growers wanting to demonstrate the highest production standards, Feed Central offers the Seed to Feed Program.

This structured inspection program helps growers showcase their production practices while giving buyers greater confidence in hay quality.

Seed to Feed growers can:

- Tell the full crop production story to buyers
- Receive a Quality Certificate recognising production standards
- Be identified by buyers on LocalAg Marketplace searching for Seed to Feed hay
- Stand out to buyers looking for verified, high-quality fodder
- Advertise hay pre-harvest on LocalAg and other platforms

Some producers may also achieve a Weed Safe badge, providing additional visibility and confidence for buyers on LocalAg listings.



Display the Seed to Feed badge on your LocalAg Marketplace listings.

Weed Safe

Launching in 2026, Feed Central's Weed Safe Program responds to increasing buyer expectations around clean, low-contamination hay.

As part of the Seed to Feed Program, Feed Central accredited inspectors assess weed management practices and current weed burden during on-farm inspections.

Growers who meet the required standard may achieve the Weed Safe badge, providing clear assurance for buyers.

Inspectors can also provide guidance to help growers meet the program standard.

Weed Safe growers can:

- Demonstrate strong weed management and attention to detail
- Show buyers their hay meets higher cleanliness standards
- Increase buyer confidence in their product
- Position hay for premium markets where weed-free product is valued



Earn the Weed Safe badge to display on your listing on LocalAg Marketplace.

On-Farm Inspections & Visual Grading

Our on-farm inspection provides a visual grade that correlates to livestock compatibility and intake, assessing aroma, colour, mould, texture, weeds, moisture and overall appeal.

- Higher grades generally mean fewer moulds and lower mycotoxin risk
- Provides buyer confidence and helps sellers benchmark their hay
- Premium FCAA and FCA hay can sell quickly and at rewarding prices; with lower grades trading at a fair price.

The results seamlessly integrate with LocalAg Marketplace, completing the quality profile of your listing and also acts as the gateway to the LocalAg Plus sales team, connecting quality-assured hay with account-managed buyers.





Fertiliser Management & Lodging Risk in Winter Hay Crops

Nitrogen management is a key driver of both hay yield and lodging risk, and should be aligned with species choice, varietal standability and realistic yield targets. While adequate nitrogen is essential to maximise biomass and protein content in hay, excessive or poorly timed applications can increase stem elongation, reduce stem strength and weaken root anchorage, particularly in high-rainfall, irrigated or high-fertility paddocks.

Lodging reduces harvest efficiency, slows curing, increases soil contamination and can result in significant quality downgrades. The risk is compounded where high nitrogen rates are combined with narrow row spacing, high sowing rates or varieties with inherently weaker straw.

Relative Lodging Susceptibility By Species (Hay Production)

Species/Type	Lodging susceptibility	Key considerations under high fertility
Forage oats	High	Very responsive to nitrogen; tall, fine stems increase lodging risk under high N, irrigation or wet spring conditions. Best suited to moderate N programs aligned to realistic yield targets.
Awnless (beardless) wheat	Moderate-high	Softer straw and higher biomass types can lodge under aggressive N programs; preferred for quality hay but requires careful N timing and rates.
Awned wheat	Moderate	Generally stronger straw than awnless types; better able to tolerate higher N rates while retaining grain option, though lodging can still occur on fertile soils.
Awnless barley	Moderate	Rapid early growth can increase lodging risk if N is front-loaded; generally shorter than oats but still responsive to high fertility.
Awned barley	Low-moderate	Strong early vigour and relatively stiff straw; lower lodging risk than oats and wheat under similar N rates, but still vulnerable in high-yielding situations.
Triticale (for comparison)	Low	Typically strong straw and good standability; tolerates higher N rates better than oats or wheat in many environments.

Nitrogen Strategy to Manage Lodging Risk

Seeking advice from your agronomist is essential. To reduce lodging risk while maintaining hay yield and quality:

- Match nitrogen rates to realistic hay yield targets, accounting for soil nitrogen supply, subsoil moisture and seasonal outlook.
- Avoid large single early nitrogen applications, particularly on fertile soils or lodging-prone species such as oats.
- Split nitrogen applications where possible, applying a portion at sowing and the balance later in the season once crop biomass potential is clearer.
- Select varieties with stronger straw or improved standability when high nitrogen rates are required to meet production goals.
- Adjust sowing rates and row spacing to avoid overly dense canopies that exacerbate lodging under high fertility.

In hay-focused systems, nitrogen inputs should be optimised to drive biomass and feed quality without exceeding the crop's structural capacity. Aligning fertiliser programs with species and varietal lodging tolerance is consistent with GRDC best-practice nutrient management and risk mitigation principles, and supports efficient, high-quality hay production.

Will There Be a Market for My Hay?

Buyers are increasingly interested in knowing the quality of hay before they buy it.

The short answer is – YES. You've heard us say it before, livestock eat 365 days a year. Australia needs hay, but hay marketing is a marathon, not a sprint. It takes time to sell.

Excluding years of drought, hay off the paddock or stored in the paddock, is typically slower to move.

There is typically always a market for hay that meets the following requirements.



High density bales

We're talking 600+ kgs per bale. Australia is a vast country with an increasingly variable climate. Hay is being moved over large distances and using a high density baler helps to minimise the freight cost and increase the potential options and regions of marketing your hay.

Shed storage

Increasingly important. Good sheds are key to preserving the quality of the product.

Quality assured product

Buyers are interested in knowing the quality of your hay before they buy it. They want to know the visual grade and feed test values and to see good quality photos! Having those 3 things, greatly assists in the marketing and moving of hay, all the while helping to maximise returns.

High quality hay

We use all the tools in the toolbox to make quality hay. (See our [Tips for a Profitable Hay Season](#) here.)

What about low quality hay?

History shows that seasonal conditions are highly variable. Quality hay will generally sell within 1–12 months of production, while lower quality hay may take longer, particularly in good seasons. Good storage and patience are key.

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monitoring systems

Hayshepherd, monitoring for environmental changes in hay sheds.

- Easy to install
- 2-3 year battery life
- Made & tested in Australia
- Alert notifications
- Device arrives operating
- Non-intrusive placement

Shepherd Monitoring Systems Pty Ltd.
Email - admin@hayshepherd.com.au
Phone - +61 455 059 812
Web - shepherdmonitoringsystems.com.au

Hay V Grain

Benefits of Making Hay for Those Who Aren't Sure

Every year around 10 million tonnes of fodder (hay, straw and silage) is produced. Total value is around \$2 billion. Approximately half is traded and half retained for farm use. Like all commodities, the market is cyclical, however, growers who are prepared to store the product in a shed, and market progressively through the year can achieve great returns.

Hay vs grain

Almost every year, hay out-performs grain in gross value per hectare. The work is there but so are the rewards.

The rule of thumb is that hay yields approximately twice that of grain, in a good season. This rule is very relevant when crops have bulk vegetation but lack soil moisture to make grain, especially after frost.

Over the last 10-20 years, hay production has become an important tool in the control of rye grass, especially in southern areas.

To highlight the potential of growing hay using this rule, Feed Central has inserted a simple gross margin budget which provides space for growers to do their own figures. The calculation compares gross margin per hectare from harvesting grain to making hay. This can be found on pages 13 and 14.

Additionally, fodder crops allow grazing to occur earlier than with a grain crop and in some regions facilitate double cropping.

Demand typically crashes in spring, during the baling period (at the height of supply). Top producers run a marathon, not a sprint with the sale process. Livestock eat 365 days /year. As producers it's important to know you don't have to sell out at harvest.



**TOGETHER WE WILL GROW OUR
SUSTAINABLE & PROFITABLE
FODDER INDUSTRY.**

**BECOME A
MEMBER**



Scan or [click here](#)
to learn more.

The Economic and Agronomic Advantages of Hay Production in Eastern Australia

Introduction

In the dynamic and challenging world of agriculture, Eastern Australian farmers face a decision each season: whether to grow hay or grain crops. This choice is not merely a matter of tradition or preference; it's a strategic decision that significantly impacts farm profitability, sustainability and risk management.

With an annual production of approximately 10 million tonnes valued at around \$2 billion, fodder crops—comprising hay, straw, and silage—represent a vital segment of the agricultural sector. Over the years we have seen professional farmers insert hay production into their cropping rotations or having the flexibility within their operation to flip from grain to hay at short notice during the season. This article investigates the economic and agronomic benefits of selecting hay over grain, supported by industry data and expert insights.

The Economic and Agronomic Advantages of Hay Production in Eastern Australia continued ...

Economic viability

The economic argument for choosing hay production over grain is compelling. Historically, hay consistently outperforms grain in terms of gross value per hectare. This is particularly notable in seasons where crops exhibit robust vegetation but face limitations due to insufficient soil moisture for grain production. Often this is compounded by frost conditions. In such scenarios, hay production not only offers a viable alternative but can significantly enhance risk mitigation strategies for farmers. The ability to switch between hay and grain production, based on prevailing conditions, enables farmers to spread their risk and optimise their agricultural outputs more effectively.

Storage and market

Timing Hay requires strategic marketing, sheds and finance. Even though livestock eat 365 days of the year, hay does not have a market every day; buyers will buy as the need arises. In times of excessive pasture growth, trade can slow to a trickle then boom in the dry periods. This said, LocalAg Plus works hard to develop markets and long term forward contracts. Producers need to be able to store their hay in sheds, complete visual assessment and feed test, then sell progressively throughout the year. It is crucial to have sufficient cashflow to achieve superior returns and capitalise on the cyclical nature of the market.

Agronomic benefits

Beyond the economic advantages, hay production offers several agronomic benefits that contribute to its appeal.

» Species Selection

Hay production gives a diverse choice between cereal crops, legume crops, mixed species, and opportunities for perennial pastures. Species selection does directly affect soil health, biodiversity and base line soil nutrients.

» Weed and Pest Management

Hay production has emerged as an effective tool in managing rye grass and other weeds, particularly in the southern regions of Eastern Australia. This benefit aligns with broader integrated pest management strategies, reducing reliance on chemical controls and mitigating the risk of herbicide resistance.

» Soil Health and Fertility

The cultivation of fodder crops can positively impact soil health by enhancing organic matter, nitrogen fixation, companion cropping and reducing erosion risk. These crops often require less intensive chemicals, contributing to the maintenance of soil fertility and structure, and assisting with chemical resistant weeds

Flexibility in crop management

Fodder crops offer flexibility in terms of grazing management, allowing in some instances for early in-crop grazing or grazing after hay production. The early production can also be beneficial in regions conducive to double cropping, maximising land use efficiency and profitability.

Operational considerations

Choosing between hay and grain production also involves considerations related to machinery, labour, and storage infrastructure. Hay production can distribute labour demands more evenly across the year, reducing the pressure during peak periods.

Infrastructure investments in the form of quality sheds with good all-weather access will limit damage to hay, optimising prices at critical times and enticing buyers to your hay.

The use of high-density balers will maximise the quantity of hay stacked safely in your shed and on the truck, reducing freight rates and the cost of delivery.

Other considerations to hay production are timing of the cutting of the crop. Cutting early in maturity will assist in getting better feed test results. The reduction of grain within the bales will result in less rodent issues during storage.

Conclusion

The choice to produce hay instead of grain is supported by economic and agronomic benefits. The potential for higher gross margins, coupled with benefits such as risk diversification, weed management, and soil health improvement, positions hay as a strategic opportunity for farmers.

However, success in hay production requires careful planning, considerations around storage, marketing, and operational capacity. As the agricultural landscape evolves, the flexibility and resilience offered by hay production will continue to be a valuable consideration.

Estimating Hay Yields – Made Easy With Our Comparison Chart!

We have inserted a simple gross margin budget which provides space for growers to do their own figures. The calculation compares gross margin per hectare from harvesting grain to making hay. Please go to the table on the next page to see your budget chart. We trust this will be helpful to you

In estimating hay yields, some experienced farmers and contractors simply multiply the grain yield by 2 (i.e. hay yield can be expected to be double that of grain). Previous experience with crop simulation tools and basic water use efficiency tables can help estimate the likely future grain yield. Please note: grain yields in drought conditions can be very hard to estimate, we strongly recommend working with a local agronomist for the best results.

Calculate

Other methods (potentially more accurate) to estimate hay yields are outlined on right.

Once you have your yield you can then move onto the Gross margin sheet attached to look at potential returns per hectare.

Costs associated with hay production

Hay harvesting contract costs will vary depending on the area on offer and the proximity of the contractor to your paddocks. We expect to see production prices rise in the coming season and advise checking with your contractor before starting. Prices may or may not include fuel. It's always best to ask.

You can expect something close to the below for the 25/26 season:

- \$60 - 70/Ha for cutting with mower conditioner
- \$15 - \$20/Ha for raking (depending on the number of times raked)
- \$25/bale for an 8x4x3; add another \$5/bale with steamer
- Add a handling and stacking cost. This amount will depend on paddock size and location of stacks or distances to the shed.

ESTIMATING HAY YIELD: METHOD 1

1. Cut 1m² of crop at the height you will cut at (NOT ground level, look closer to 20cm to produce quality hay)
2. Get kg/m² fresh weight using scales
3. Multiply by 10 to calculate t/Ha fresh weight
4. Repeat at 4 or 5 paddock locations to determine average
5. Assume 20% - 30% of fresh weight makes it into a dry bale - multiply by 0.2 or 0.3 to calculate hay yield t/Ha

ESTIMATING HAY YIELD: METHOD 2

1. Cut 1 m² of crop at the height you will cut at (NOT ground level, look closer to 20cm to produce quality hay)
2. Dry in 50°C oven and weigh after a minimum of 24 hours to calculate kg/ m² dry weight at approx. 12% moisture
3. Multiply by 10 to calculate t/Ha dry matter
4. Assume 80% - 90% ** of the dry weight makes it into a bale - multiply by 0.8 or 0.9 to calculate hay yield t/Ha
5. Repeat at 4 or 5 paddock locations (EXAMPLE: Five 1m² cuts on a barley paddock, average weight 1.09 kg/m² fresh weight 1.09 x 10 = 10.9 t/Ha of fresh material 10.9 x 25% = 2.7 t/Ha estimated hay yield *

* The % conversion increases with crop maturity. For crops that have flowered and are into grain fill, assume closer to 30% as the final hay yield estimate. Less mature/fresher crops use 20% - 25% as final yield estimate.
** Final hay yield will depend on losses after cutting due to weather, raking or baler set-up.



Hay vs Grain Calculator

In many years, hay can out-perform grain in gross value per hectare. This is particularly relevant in dry years with frost.

Calculate what is best for you*. Complete the tables (right) for producing hay and then repeat for producing grain and compare your margins.

(Please note, we strongly recommend working with a local agronomist for best results).

Scan the QR code to use our online Hay v Grain Calculator.



CEREAL HAY MAKING GROSS MARGIN			Example	Your Estimate
Step 1 - Estimate Gross Return Per Ha Estimate				
Yield <i>(use tools from this sheet)</i>		A	4.5	_____tonnes/Ha
Estimate your Sell Price (FARM GATE BASIS)		B	250	\$_____tonnes
Total Gross Return Per Ha (A x B)		C	1125	\$_____Ha
Step 2 - Determine Your Pre-Baling Expenses (normally quoted per Ha) <i>TIP: The higher the yield, the cheaper the per tonne cost</i>				
	Contract Mowing	D	65	_____/Ha
	Contract Raking	E	30	_____/Ha
	Other	F		_____/Ha
	Sub-Total Step 1 (D+E+F)	G	75	_____/Ha
Step 3 - Determine Your Baling and Post-Baling Expenses (normally done per bale) <i>TIP: The heavier the bale- the cheaper the per tonne cost</i>				
	Baling	H	30	\$_____/bale
	Handling	I	8	\$_____/bale
	Other	J		\$_____/bale
	Sub-Total 2 (H+I+J)	K	30	\$_____/bale
Step 4 - Determine Bales per Ha and Cost per Ha <i>TIP: When paying contractor per bale, watch bale weights carefully</i>				
Estimate Bale Weights		L	600	_____kg
	Bales Per Ha = Yield (A) divided by Bale Weight (L) x 1000	M	7.5	_____bales/Ha
	Cost Per Ha = (M) x Cost Per Bale (K)	N	225	\$_____/Ha
Step 5 - Calculate Gross Margin				
	Calculate Total Cost Per Ha (G+N)	O	300	\$_____/Ha
	Calculate Gross Margin (C-O)	P	825	\$_____/Ha
GRAIN GROSS MARGIN			Example	Your Estimate
Step 1 - Estimate Gross Return Per Ha Estimate				
Yield		Q	2.25	_____tonnes/Ha
Estimate Your Sell Price (FARM GATE BASIS)		R	360	\$_____tonnes
Total Gross Return Per Ha (AxB)		S	810	\$_____Ha
Step 2 - Determine Your Harvest Expenses (normally quoted per Ha) <i>TIP: The higher the yield the cheaper the per tonne cost</i>				
	Header Contractor	T	60	_____/Ha
	Other	U	15	_____/Ha
	Sub-Total Step 2 (T+U)	V	75	_____/Ha
Step 3 - Calculate Gross Margin				
	Calculate Gross Margin (S-W)	W	735	\$_____/Ha
Which Return is Best - Hay (P) or Grain (W)?			\$90	HAY GIVES A HIGHER RETURN PER HA.

* The % conversion increases with crop maturity. For crops that have flowered and are into grain fill, assume closer to 30% as the final Hay yield estimate. Less mature/fresher crops use 20% - 25% as final yield estimate.

**Final Hay yield will depend on losses after cutting due to weather, raking or baler set-up.

Feed Central + LocalAg = Success



Seamless Integration with the LocalAg Marketplace.

Unlike general marketplaces, LocalAg is built specifically for buying and selling hay.

Combined with Feed Central's Quality Assurance services, buyers can see verified users, secure payments and trusted quality information all in one place.

Quality assurance, secure trading and experienced support, built to make hay trading easier.

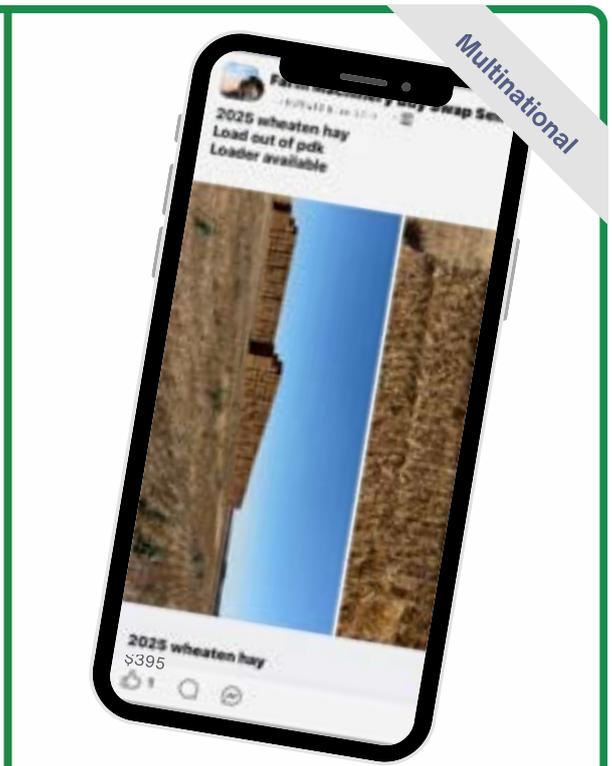


Australian & family owned



- ✔ Built for buying & selling hay
- ✔ Hay specific search filters (e.g. bale size, protein, visual grade, storage)
- ✔ Seamless integration with Feed Central Quality Assurance featured
- ✔ Secure payments & verified users
- ✔ Delivered pricing
- ✔ Real people that care

Multinational



- ✘ Hay specific search capabilities
- ✘ Integration with Feed Central
- ✘ Quality assurance featured
- ✘ Payments & verified users
- ✘ Delivered pricing
- ✘ Real people on the phone



Inoculants at Planting: Supporting Winter Crops from the Start

Supporting Winter Crops From the Start

Winter crops like oats, barley, wheat and triticale are central to many farming systems, alongside legumes such as vetch and pulses.

Using microbial inoculants at planting is an increasingly common practice to support early crop establishment and improve overall performance.

Why use inoculants?

Applied to seed or in-furrow at sowing, inoculants introduce beneficial microbes that establish around plant roots and assist early growth.

Potential benefits include:

- Improved crop establishment
- Stronger root development
- Better access to nutrients already in the soil
- Increased biomass production
- Improved performance under challenging conditions

Cereal crops

While cereals don't fix nitrogen, soil microbes can still improve performance by supporting nutrient uptake and root growth.

In cereals, inoculants can:

- Help unlock nutrients like phosphorus and micronutrients
- Support early vigour and root development
- Improve access to moisture and nutrients

Legume crops

In legumes, inoculation is essential for effective nitrogen fixation.

When inoculated correctly:

- Rhizobium bacteria form nodules on roots
- Atmospheric nitrogen is converted into plant-available nitrogen
- Crops rely less on soil nitrogen
- Without effective inoculation:
 - Poor nodulation
 - Reduced growth and biomass
 - Greater reliance on soil or applied nitrogen

Benefits across the rotation

Inoculation doesn't just benefit one crop, it supports the whole system.

Across the rotation:

- Improved establishment and biomass
- Reduced nitrogen fertiliser requirements (legumes)
- Increased soil nitrogen for following crops
- Better overall system productivity

When is inoculation most important?

Inoculation is particularly important when:

- A paddock hasn't grown that legume before
- Several years have passed since the last legume crop
- Soil conditions limit rhizobia survival (acidic, sandy or waterlogged soils)

Inoculants are a low-cost tool that can support crop establishment, improve nutrient availability and contribute to long-term soil fertility.

Used effectively, they help set crops up early and deliver benefits across the entire farming rotation.



**Get your hay tested.
Sell with confidence.**

Forage makes up a significant part of every ruminant diet. Knowing exactly what you've grown helps you market it with confidence and match it to the right buyer.

Feed Central feed testing gives you:

- Accurate, independent analysis backed by Dairy One
- Up to 40 nutrient results with fast turnaround (NIR or Wet Chemistry)
- Data you can share directly with your nutritionist
- Confidence to position your hay based on quality, not guesswork

Test results integrate with your marketing, helping buyers understand exactly what they're purchasing.

feedcentral.com.au | 1300 669 429

Bale Innovation & Freight Efficiency

The Future of Hay

by Tim Ford, Managing Director - Feed Central

For more than 25 years, Feed Central has encouraged the industry to think differently about bale weights and bale dimensions. That push has helped change the hay market from a largely local trade to a national market, with hay now regularly moving long distances across Australia. It's a shift we're proud to have helped drive and acknowledge the significant investment made by machinery manufacturers, transport operations and farmers that have helped drive these efficiencies across the industry.

During this time we've worked with hundreds of growers as the industry transitioned from round bales to large square bales, including formats such as 8x4x4, 8x3x3 and now the widely adopted 8x4x3.

In the long term, we expect further efficiencies will be gained in 7x4x3 bales, which can be transported by rail, sea and tautliners.

Today, Feed Central is encouraging the next step in that evolution: trialing 7x4x3 bales. Importantly, this format can be produced using existing baling equipment, meaning no major machinery changes are required.

Over the coming decade we believe the industry standard may gradually shift from 8x4x3 to 7x4x3. The reason is simple. Smaller dimensions improve freight choices, allowing hay to move further and more cost-effectively.

Potential advantages include:

- Easier loading into tautliners and containers for rail freight
- Reduced freight costs over long distances
- Improved handling and transport flexibility
- Potential for future port-to-port sea freight opportunities

We believe innovations like this will play an important role in the future of long-haul, cost-effective hay freight.

Alternative Bale Sizes Unpacked

If you are considering making round bales, consider 4x4 bales which have freight advantages over 5x4 rounds. We do understand that some producers find a niche in small squares and rounds.

High-density, large, square bales are normally cheaper to make when calculated on a per tonne basis. It is also quicker and easier to move a large volume of large squares both on farm and on trucks.

Do not underestimate the importance of this. Bale weights and sizes are the area where smart growers maximise their returns and create huge efficiencies in their operation. In very simple terms, imagine all the extra work and man hours required to move 500kg bales off your paddock versus 750kg bales. Think of the cost. Now, multiply this tenfold as you think about loading, transport, unloading etc.

Deimhorst Moisture Meter

The Deimhorst Navigator FX-20 moisture meter has the ability to check hay moisture in bales or windrow, matched with class leading accuracy and clarity!

\$1685
+ postage





What Do Hay Buyers Really Want?

Every buyer is different. Calving programs, dairies in peak milk, backgrounding cattle or finishing stock all place different demands on feed.

The key is simple. Match the hay to the job.

From energy and protein through to bale size and freight efficiency, the right product can meet a wide range of production goals. And just like hay types, your buyers are not all the same.

In summary, here's what hay buyers want:

- **Heavy, large, square bales** that maximise freight and handling efficiencies at every stage. High Density (HD) balers that can deliver this size bale are now highly preferred.
- **Feed with high energy & good protein**, so baling while the crop is immature is vital. The higher the energy (M.E.) the better. The best way to increase energy is to cut early.
- **Oats, barley, wheat, vetch and lucerne hay** that is green in colour with no (or minimal) weather damage.
- **Minimal or no weeds**
- **Access to fodder 365 days** of the year.
- **Shedded product**, with all-weather access

In the LocalAg *Plus* system, buyers are quoted delivered prices to their property within seconds. Obviously, the heavier bales are, the lower freight cost per tonne will be. Growers with heavy bale weights will often get a higher ex-farm price as the freight component is cheaper, so even though the supplier's ex-farm price is higher, the buyer's price is lower, so EVERYONE'S A WINNER.

High-density, large, square bales, such as those made by the Krone 8 String Balers, are very popular because you achieve an excellent load on a Drop-Deck or B-Double trailer and most front-end loaders can handle the weight.

Heavy bales will achieve pay weights in general, so focusing on achieving heavy weights regardless of the bale configuration will always be of benefit to your operation.



LocalAg *Plus* is hay trading the traditional way with our sales team at your service.

You have access to their expertise, knowledge and contacts as well as the extensive LocalAg Marketplace audience.



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