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**State officials encourage livestock owners to prepare for hay shortage**

(Palmer, AK) – The Division of Agriculture and the State Veterinarian are recommending that Alaskans who feed hay to their livestock and other animals tighten their management practices and contact suppliers to ensure they will have enough high-quality hay to carry their animals through this year's expected winter hay shortage.

Due to extreme weather conditions, the availability of Alaska Grown hay is expected to be limited this winter. During times of hay shortage, there is a tendency to ration and use any available hay or alternative feed products. Feeding with poor-quality hay can have both short and long-term consequences for animal health due to potential issues such as poor digestibility, low nutrient content, and contamination with noxious weeds. Potential impacts include nutritional problems, lower body conditions and reduced energy reserves to meet the increased demands during winter. This elevated stress can lead to infections, poor conception rates and poor calf/foal survival in the spring.

Good management practices and supply verification is critical and it is best to start planning now. The following are general recommendations:

- Contact your suppliers now to ensure product availability and/or make alternate plans to assure a steady supply of quality hay.
- Look for ways to decrease the amount of hay that animals naturally waste. Horses, in particular, tend to pull out hay to play with it.
- Use a covered feeder up off the ground and do not let animals free-feed from large bales. Contact your veterinarian for specific guidelines on managing feed schedules, such as allowing access to large hay bales only two to three times per day.
- Before using alternative feeds such as spent grains, stale bread or other options, consult with your veterinarian or Cooperative Extension Service agent.

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