

Illinois  
Extension



Illinois 4-H

**Hay Project**

**RESOURCES**





# WELCOME

Welcome to your hay production journey! Growing and managing hay is a great way to learn about agriculture, understand livestock nutrition, and develop valuable farming skills. A successful hay producer needs to be knowledgeable about soil health, understand plant biology and growth cycles, be safety-minded around equipment, and know how to harvest and store quality forage.

This guide will help you identify resources to help you learn to be a skilled, knowledgeable, and successful hay producer. Explore the resources available, from agricultural extension publications to instructional videos, to hands-on farm visits and online courses, and choose the ones that are right for you!

Want help planning your learning journey? Use the Project Plans available for different ages on the Illinois 4-H website at [go.illinois.edu/memberresources](https://go.illinois.edu/memberresources).

From here, you can decide if you want to gain broad hay production knowledge or go deep and learn about a specific topic, like soil testing and fertility management, forage species selection, or proper hay storage techniques.

As part of your learning journey, you're invited to share something you learned at your local 4-H show or fair. Consider displaying hay samples, presenting a demonstration on hay quality testing, or sharing your experiences with different cutting schedules.

In 2026, the Illinois 4-H program offered Hay as a State-Fair eligible project for the first time. As such, we are also eager to hear your feedback and experiences with this project resource. Please access this link to share resources, ideas and learning opportunities with other 4-H families: [Hay Project Resource Feedback](#)



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# HAY PROJECT STATE FAIR GUIDELINES

## Hay (SF 50191) Record Book – Required

Exhibit one flake from a small bale (or the equivalent volume from a large or round bale) of dry hay in a clear plastic box with a lid or heavy-duty clear bag of the current year's hay crop that is representative of the member's 4-H project field;

OR

Exhibit an experimental or educational project related to one experience from your project. Include an explanation of the project in a report for public understanding. Include the member's crop records with the exhibit, such as the 4-H crop record found online at [go.illinois.edu/4HCropsRecord](http://go.illinois.edu/4HCropsRecord) or an FFA crops record.

## HAY PROJECT STATE FAIR SCORESHEETS

As you prepare for Fair season, be sure to reference the most recent scoresheets for the Hay project on the Illinois 4-H website under the Illinois 4-H State Fair event page:

[4h.extension.illinois.edu/events/state-events/illinois-state-fair](http://4h.extension.illinois.edu/events/state-events/illinois-state-fair)





## GUIDING YOUR LEARNING

The purpose of the new classes and learning opportunities in the Hay project area for Illinois 4-H has been to allow 4-H members the opportunity to expand the project resources that they can utilize to guide their learning. Below, you will see some suggested resources as well as some guidelines for locating the Hay project resources you find most useful.

### Here are a few resources to get you started

- “Forages, Hay, and Grazing.” University of Illinois Extension, Orr Agricultural Research and Demonstration Center, [IL Extension Link](#)
- Meteer, Travis. “Pasture Management.” University of Illinois Extension, [IL Extension Link](#)
- Morrison, Jim. “Hay and Pasture Production.” University of Illinois Extension, Illinois 4-H, 1998, [IL Extension Link](#)
- Morrison, Jim. “Hay and Pasture.” Illinois Agronomy Handbook, University of Illinois Extension, [IL Extension Link](#)
- Tibbs, Reagen. “Forage Fundamentals: Managing Hay Cuttings, Part One.” University of Illinois Extension, 23 May 2025, [IL Extension Link](#)
- Tibbs, Reagen. “Forage Fundamentals: Managing Hay Cuttings, Part Two.” University of Illinois Extension, 30 May 2025, [IL Extension Link](#)

As you start out looking for additional resources, here are some helpful things that can help you determine the quality of an information source:

**Credible** - Resources that are known to be research-based.

- University / Land Grant programs (often ending in .edu)
- Botanical gardens and professional horticulture organizations
- Established publishers of gardening and horticulture books
- 4-H, FFA, or Extension materials

**Accurate** - Consistent across multiple, reputable sources.

- Compare 2-3 different sources
- Look for agreement on:
  - Plant science fundamentals
  - Plant correctness for the region

**Current** - Plant science information changes as best practices evolve.

- Check the publication or update date
- Focus on resources from the last 10-15 years

**Clear** - Resources that explain why something works.

- Step-by-step explanations
- Photos or diagrams
- References to research, trials, or Extension guidance

**Educational** - Resources that are about teaching and not about selling.

- Encourages learning and experimentation
- Explains options, not just one ‘perfect’ method
- Educational in tone, not pushing a product





## SHOWING YOUR LEARNING

The 4-H program is about learning by doing, and 4-H participants are encouraged to demonstrate their learning in this project by preparing a landscape design that is realistic and pleasing to the viewer. Consult your county's show book for exhibit rules and guidelines. Practice makes better designs. Below are a few tips and tricks to use as your practice your Agronomy skills.

### **Fair Exhibit Ideas: Hay (SF 50191)**

- Compare the ideal harvest window vs. delayed harvest using two samples
- Create a visual breakdown chart estimating the grass, legume, and weed percentages of your hay
- Display field notes/weather log along with flake of hay from the current year to connect weather events to hay quality changes
- Utilize visuals to represent yield per acre, cutting dates, and input costs to focus on profitability vs. quality tradeoffs
- Estimate losses from weather exposure comparing different storage methods (barn storage, outdoor cover, tarp system, etc.)

## FEEDBACK FORM

Please take a moment to share your best resources, activities, and project ideas with the rest of the Illinois 4-H program! Your feedback will help us develop a more extensive project resource guide for the 4-H Hay project area: **[4-H Hay Project Feedback Form](#)**

## CREDITS

Mark Becker, 4-H Food Systems Specialist, compiled this resource. It was originally published to the Illinois 4-H website in March, 2026.

## PHOTO CREDITS

All photos accessed under the Canva Teams Pro licensing agreement.

Cover: Tractor Towing Merger on Cut Alfalfa (Hay) Field by BanksPhotos; Hay Bails in Field by Phil Lewis, Green Hay Field by SplitShire

Page 2: Man Riding On Riding Mower Carrying Hay In The Middle Of A Field by Mark Stebnicki

Page 3: Horse Eating Hay by goceris; Farmer Feeding Hay to Cute Cows inside Cowshed in Dairy Farm, Closeup by Africa images

Page 6: Panoramic Photography of Green Field by Ákos Szabó





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