National Forage Testing Association
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To Whom It May Concern:

The Board of Directors of the National Forage Testing Association (NFTA) does not support using Relative Feed Value (RFV) as a primary means of assigning nutritional value to alfalfa as the most appropriate practice. RFV is a calculated index based on a numerical scale, rather than a directly measured chemical analysis such as Acid Detergent Fiber (ADF), Neutral Detergent Fiber (NDF), or Crude Protein (CP).

The NFTA certifies laboratories based on acceptable performance on analysis of forages. The certification criteria are ±3 Horwitz Standard Deviations (HSDs) from the reference method average (RMA), which is the average result among labs running the defined reference method. The HSD increases as the RMA increases, as outlined below:

RMA	HSD
10	0.28
20	0.51
30	0.72
40	0.92
50	1.11
60	1.30

Therefore, under NFTA guidelines, using the acceptable ranges for ADF or NDF can lead to wide variation in RFV calculations. For example, an alfalfa hay sample with an ADF of 30 and an NDF of 40 can have an RFV between 137 and 164, depending on how the values fall relative to the mean. The RFV of 137 would meet the “Fair” classification; however, an RFV of 164, despite falling within the same acceptable ADF and NDF guidelines, would be considered ”Good” if the ADF is 20 and the NDF is 30, the RFV range increases to between 207 and 243. This demonstrates how relying on a single calculated ranking index to determine the nutritional value ranking can produce large discrepancies, especially as values approach the edges of acceptable analytical ranges. These issues are further compounded by the fact that RFV is a calculated index rather than a directly measured nutritional value parameter. NFTA-certified laboratories are evaluated on the accuracy of “as-received” Dry Matter (DM), CP, ADF, and NDF. Please reference the included USDA Alfalfa Guidelines included below.

For these reasons, the NFTA recommends that hay producers, brokers, and buyers rely on multiple directly measured components rather than a calculated index when determining the

retail or wholesale value of hay. We encourage an approach that evaluates the nutritional value of alfalfa hay using two components expressed as a percentage of the dry matter that are consistently and accurately analyzed in laboratories offering both Near-Infrared Spectroscopy (NIRS) and chemistry methods:

1. Crude Protein (CP) is essential in any feed analysis, as it is required for formulating all livestock diets. While some of the protein may be damaged or unavailable, CP still represents a digestible source of amino acids in the feed.

2. Neutral Detergent Fiber (NDF) includes hemicellulose, cellulose, and lignin, which make up the components of the plant cell wall. Although not all these fractions are digestible, NDF represents the total structural carbohydrates available in the feed. For the dairy industry, structural carbohydrates play a primary role in supporting milk production.

By focusing on these two directly measured components, those involved in buying, selling, or evaluating alfalfa hay can better determine its true nutritional value. This approach also allows for narrower, more meaningful ranges when assessing quality.

Respectfully, thank you for consideration.

Brian Steinlicht, President

David McIntosh, Past President

Eva Lynch, Vice President

Kevin Grooms, Treasurer

Signed on behalf of the entire Board of Directors of the National Forage Testing Association.

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Alfalfa Guidelines (domestic livestock use and not more than 10% grass)

Quality	ADF	NDF	RFV	TDN-100%	TDN-90%	CP
Supreme	<27	<34	>185	>62	>55.9	>22
Premium	27-29	34-36	170-185	60.5-62	54.5-55.9	20-22
Good	29-32	36-40	150-170	58-60	52.5-54.5	18-20
Fair	32-35	40-44	130-150	56-58	50.5-52.5	16-18
Utility	>35	>44	<130	<56	<50.5	<16

Note: Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN) and RFV are calculated values. There is no indication, or reference to, of what equations were used to calculate such values for this table.

Source: USDA. Hay quality designation guidelines. USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service. Retrieved June 3, 2026. https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/HayQualityGuidelines.pdf

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