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Corn Silage Considerations – Northern Focus

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Growing up on a dairy farm I found that one of my favorite times of year was when we began chopping silage and filling our stave silo's. At the time I did not give much thought to the importance of this harvest. After thinking more about it this was our feed supply for the next year and like any feed in high producing cow herds, quality of feed is very important. I hope to address a few considerations to be made as you begin to chop corn silage.



One of the most important considerations is a timely harvest with respect to the moisture content of the silage. Corn silage moisture significantly impacts the storability as well as livestock performance. If you are storing silage in a bunker the best moisture is between 65-70%. If you are filling a silo the appropriate moisture is between 62-67%. It is recommended to do a burndown of a few plants before you plan to harvest. This will give you an idea of where the silage moisture is and help you plan on when your ideal harvest window will be. Moisture will drop 0.5% per day and may dry faster if you are in dry conditions.

Another consideration to make is make sure you are monitoring the nitrate content in the corn silage. This is an issue in drought conditions where nitrates accumulate in the stalk. There are a few ways to avoid this issue. First, cut the corn higher leaving more of the stalk in the field. This is because the nitrates will accumulate in the bottom of the stalk where the highest concentration is. Also, by ensiling the silage for 3-4 weeks will drop your nitrates by 50%. Ideally nitrates should be under 1000 ppm for safe feeding. It is best to have the silage sampled after the ensiling process to make sure that levels are safe for feeding.

Lastly, choosing the correct hybrid to use to maximize silage yields is important. Height of corn is not always a characteristic that identifies a good silage hybrid, however most silage hybrids will be taller. The weight of the ear can account for a large percentage of yield. Hybrids that have worked well in Minnesota are LG5470, LG5499, LG5494, and LG5565. All these hybrids have performed on silage yield as well as high quality feed.

Additional Information

<http://corn.agronomy.wisc.edu/Silage/S004.aspx>

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