

It's Corn Silage Time!

Corn Silage time is among us! Feeding corn silage to cattle can be great, or it can be a nightmare. With the right type of corn silage your cows can produce more milk, have a greater daily gain, and/or improve body conditioning scores. But, how do you plant a corn field and turn it into feed? More goes into it than some people think.

Before all of us pesky sales-people start showing up at your farm, there are some things the farmer can do to help everyone maximize success on their farm. It starts by figuring out what the farmer likes to see in their corn silage. Do you like a tall or short corn plant? Do you like to have a higher or lower planting population? Do you like all the ears to be the same size or do you want to try and maximize ear size? Do you want a high quality feed or are you looking for a higher-tonnage / lower quality feed for young stock? Does this variety need to be a dual purpose or is it just silage specific? Do you want chopper boxes full or tonnage (what takes up more room: 1# of feathers or 1# of lead)? These are just a few of the questions the farmer should know the answer to. By knowing what you want, a sales agronomist can help select the varieties better. Do not be afraid to try more than one brand. No one company has all the best products. By trying multiple companies you can see what is working best for YOU. There are so many other questions to go with selecting seed, but this is a good start.

Corn silage yields like crazy! There are not many crops that you can plant and get large dry matter yields, but corn silage is one. People like silage for many reasons and lots of feed is one. With that being said, corn silage doesn't get to its largest potential without nutrients. Silage takes all the same nutrients that grain takes and lots more. When you take that impressive silage crop off don't forget beside the nitrogen, sulfur, and micro nutrients the grain needs, that plant you take has a lot of potash and phosphorus in it. If you don't replace all the nutrients you take off, sustainable large yields will not be obtainable.

So now you have the seed in the ground and the fertilizer program figured out, when do you harvest? There are many ways to tell when your corn silage is ready to be harvested, some more accurate than others. There is the method of watching for the corn to silk and waiting 42-47 days. Another method is to watch the milk line of the kernels, however ear worms, disease, or drought stress can affect kernels. Yet another method is to watch the plant greenness. However, I feel the most effective way is to chop 3 representative plants in a wood chipper and perform a burndown, per field. Most years all of these methods can get you close, but this year is not a typical year. I have seen corn that hasn't dented yet test 68%, and dark green plants from root to tassel test 66%. None of the tests are perfect so I would use multiple tests to get you to a range.

I hope everyone has a great and safe harvest season! Don't forget to get out in the fields and start checking moisture to optimize storage. Also, send samples into a lab to check feed quality.

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