
Drought Ideas

SOYBEAN HAY: A frequent question at the Extension Office has been about using soybeans for hay or silage. Soybeans can make hay equivalent to mid-bloom alfalfa hay (average quality alfalfa). Would I recommend it, No! So what's the problem? Drought stricken soybeans are short, in most fields we still see last year's corn residue still sticking up. After paying the swather, the tedder, and the baler the half ton of hay is break-even at best. If we had only four pods per plant and caught a couple timely rains this month we could cut 5 bushels per acre of soybeans a \$50 per acre value after harvest costs and still have some field residue cover. I strongly recommend you keep the beans through to harvest. Consult you crop insurance agent before any thought of haying soybeans.

POTENTIAL NITRATE ISSUES IN CORN FORAGE: Corn grown in drought conditions can potentially contain nitrates. The majority of the nitrates will be in the lower 8 inches of the stalk. The nitrate levels are going to be the highest in corn which died before tasseling. The corn fermentation occurring in silage reduces the nitrates in the feed by 50%. Cattle being fed a ration containing corn or milo grain like fed cattle or dairy are likely not going to be affected since the high energy diet will convert the nitrate to protein. More caution needs to be taken with beef cows being fed low energy diets. Nitrate tests below 1000 ppm are considered relatively safe. 1000-2100 ppm are safe for non-pregnant animals. The most important factor in feeding any potential nitrate feed is to introduce the feed to the animals in stages. Add testing of the forages and blending with lower nitrate feeds for a complete program. Corn silage, hay, or grazed corn is excellent cattle feed and can be a part of any ration with proper consideration. In corn with no ear development, cutting height raised to 6 to 8 inches will reduce the amount of nitrates in the feed. Before feeding drought damaged corn silage, allow it to go through at least a 21-day fermentation period before feeding. Shorter fermentation times may cause some of the nitrates to still be in the dangerous nitrite form, just like heated green chop.

EXTENSION DROUGHT RESPONSE: I am part of a statewide taskforce to provide information necessary for decision making options for farmers ranchers and farm businesses across the state. The education materials on drought response are being located in one website. That is <http://droughtresources.unl.edu/> The amount of information there is impressive and should handle most situations.

CORN STORAGE CHALLENGE: Corn test weight is a good indicator of corn storability. Corn that is below 54 pounds per bushel after it is dry should not be stored into warm weather next summer. It is more important that the corn be below 15 percent moisture and that regular air fronts keep the grain uniform in moisture. Lighter corn also will break more in handling, so be sure to remove a load or two of corn to remove fines from the bin core. It is also not wise to mix corn of different crop years in the same storage bin; the mix is less stable than each year's crop stored separately. Check your grain at least every two weeks, with some way to take grain temperatures. If a slow rise is noted, aerate and or sell the grain. Hot spots can quickly involve grade changes for the entire bin.

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