

SELECTING CORN HYBRIDS FOR SILAGE

Corn silage is a main feedstuff for many livestock. But choosing the right hybrid to plant can be tricky.

You know what to look for when choosing corn hybrids for grain — things like yield, standability, maturity, and pest resistance. But what about silage? What else should you look for?

Of course, yield is very important — both grain yield and forage yield. But since we feed whole plant silage to livestock, forage quality or feed value of the silage is especially important.

Historically, we thought high grain hybrids would produce the best silage. But now we know we were wrong! Characteristics good for grain, like fast kernel drying and hard texture, are bad for silage. Fortunately, genetic advances by corn breeders have helped improve silage feed value so you can select hybrids based on forage quality.

When comparing silage forage quality traits, primarily look for high starch digestibility and high NDF digestibility. Starch digestibility is affected by many factors, but hybrids with soft kernel texture and slow kernel drying tend to digest easier and preserve better.

High fiber digestibility also comes from several traits. One trait is called brown midrib. It helps livestock on high silage diets perform better although brown midrib hybrids tend to yield less and lodge more than regular hybrids. Regardless of source, though, high fiber digestibility is desired.

If you feed silage to high performing livestock, it may be profitable to sacrifice some yield for higher quality. So look at quality traits next time you plant corn for silage.

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