

Swath Grazing of Weather Damaged Corn

Drought! Hail! Wind! Even an early freeze!

All these weather events can greatly lower corn grain yield. When weather like drought causes grain yield of corn to be low we often use the crop as a forage to get a little bit more value from it. Chopping it for silage traditionally has been the most popular choice but cutting it for hay or even grazing the standing corn have been used.

There is another forage option, though, that you might want to try this year or in the future - swath grazing. Swath grazing has some advantages over other salvage methods. Compared to silage, timing of harvest isn't very critical for swath grazing - and you don't need storage or as much harvest equipment. Compared to hay, you don't need to bale and move the feed around. And compared to grazing standing corn, setting fences will be much easier and there will be much less trampling loss.

Swath grazing really is quite simple. The hardest part is making the swath. Thick stalks can be hard to cut and feed cleanly through a swather or windrower. If you have a hay conditioner, remove it or open it as wide as possible. Otherwise, if you have any grain, much of it will be shelled from the ear, fall to the ground, and be lost.

Before you start grazing, be sure to condition cattle to eating grain, otherwise if they selectively eat mostly ears at first they may suffer acidosis. And use fences to force them to clean up most of the swath. Not only does this stretch your feed supply, it also removes residues that could impede next spring's tillage or planting.

If you plan to salvage corn as a forage, don't automatically chop silage. Consider swath grazing as an easier and cheaper alternative.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu



University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension educational programs abide with the nondiscrimination policies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.. Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.