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CORN SILAGE TIPS

Early planted corn this year is now in the dough stage and soon it will be dent stage. After beginning dent there is about another 10 days to half milk line and that generally is the sweet spot for quality corn silage. I had a local farmer ask how to price silage in the field this week. A neighbor approached him for the first time looking for additional cattle feed on about 30 acres. Estimating yield becomes very important.

For corn that has been drought stressed with limited grain yield potential, about 1 ton of silage per acre can be obtained for each 5 bushels of grain per acre. For example, if you expect a grain yield on dryland corn of 50 bushels per acre, you can expect about 10 tons per acre of 30% dry matter silage (3 tons per acre dry matter yield).

For “more normal” dryland corn yielding more than 100 bushels per acre, about one ton of silage per acre can be expected for each 6 to 7 bushels of grain per acre. For example, if expected grain yield is 125 bushels per acre, corn silage yields will be about 18 to 20 tons per acre of 30% dry matter silage (5 to 6 tons per acre dry matter yield).

A historical rule of thumb for pricing corn silage per ton at 65% moisture has been to value it at 8-10 times the price of a bushel of corn. Another common pricing point of reference has been that corn silage is equal to 1/3 the price of alfalfa hay.

UNL research has shown corn silage priced in the field should be at 7.65 times the price per bushel of corn per ton of corn silage at 60-65% moisture. This value is consistent regardless of corn price published in CropWatch in 2013. At \$3.00 corn, corn silage packed in the bunker should be close to 11 times the price per bushel of corn. At \$6.00 corn, corn silage packed in the bunker should be close to 9.3 times the price per bushel of corn. More information can be found at: <http://beef.unl.edu/pricing-corn-silage-relative-to-corn> Shrink becomes a factor when pricing in the bunk.

High-quality corn silage often is an economical substitute for some of the grain in finishing and in dairy rations. And corn silage can be an important winter feed for cow-calf producers. All too often, though, we fail to harvest silage to get its best feed value.

Harvest timing is critical for success. Timing needs to be based on moisture content of the silage. Silage chopped too early and wetter than seventy percent moisture can run or seep and it often produces a sour, less palatable fermentation. We often get this wet silage when we rush to salvage hail or wind damaged corn. Live green stalks, leaves, and husks almost always are more than eighty percent moisture so be patient and wait until these tissues start to dry before chopping.

Normal corn, though, is often chopped for silage too dry, below sixty percent moisture. Then it's difficult to pack the silage adequately to force out air. The silage heats, energy and protein digestibility declines, and spoilage increases. If your silage is warm or steams during winter, it probably was too dry when chopped.

Many corn hybrids are at the ideal 60 to 70 percent moisture as corn kernels reach the one-half milkline. This guide isn't perfect for all hybrids, though, so check your own fields independently.



Corn kernels in silage between half milcline and black layer are more digestible. Drier, more mature corn grain tends to pass through the animal more often without digesting unless processed. Also, older leaves and stalks are less digestible.

Cattle feeders are encouraged to chop silage at the proper moisture level. The outcome will be better feed and hopefully, better profits.

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