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## DON'T FEED FRESH SILAGE TOO SOON

Silage is an important part of the feeding program for many livestock operations. And it often becomes available when grazing resources often begin to run out, especially if it has been dry.

Be patient, though. Don't be in a hurry to feed it. It could be poisonous!

Many times, crops stressed by drought or other factors will contain high levels of nitrates. Making these crops into silage is one good way to safen these feeds because the fermentation process usually reduces the nitrate content of this feed.

However, during the first few days of early fermentation the chopped forage begins to heat, converting those nitrates first into nitrites. And, nitrites are as much as ten times more poisonous to cattle than nitrates. As the fermentation process continues later on, these nitrites are neutralized and converted into other compounds that make them less toxic.

So, if you feed your freshly chopped forage before it has completed its full fermentation cycle, you risk giving your cattle highly poisonous forage filled with nitrites.

Avoid this problem. First, wait three or four weeks after chopping before feeding fresh silage. Then, test your silage for nitrates before feeding. And use the results of the test to feed accordingly.

Having crops and pastures damaged by dry weather is bad enough. Don't make it worse by feeding toxic silage to your cattle.

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](mailto:banderson1@unl.edu)



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