

## Check Silage Moisture Using the Squeeze Test

We all know how important it is to get the right moisture content in silage for proper packing and effective fermentation. But how do you know when moisture is right? Proper moisture content of silage is critical for achieving good quality feed. In bunker silos, a moisture content of 65 to 70 percent is what we want. Any higher and seepage or a sour fermentation can occur. Any drier and the silage will heat or mold, maybe both.

It isn't easy to tell what the moisture content is just by looking at the field, though. But there are several ways to determine for yourself when your forage is at the right moisture content.

Obviously, the best way is to take some freshly chopped forage and actually weigh it and then dry it. But this takes more time, equipment, and planning than you sometimes have.

A useful in-field method is called the squeeze test. Start by chopping some forage as you would to fill the silo. Then grab a couple handfuls of chopped forage and squeeze them as tightly in your fists as you can for about 30 seconds. Does free juice run or drip from your fingers? If so, this forage is too wet for best ensiling. Wait to chop a few days and try again.

What if it doesn't drip? Then, slowly open your hand. Is your hand barely damp and does the ball of forage start to fall apart quickly? This forage is too dry and is likely to heat and spoil in the silo. Find a wetter forage to mix with it or maybe add lots of water.

But, instead, are your fingers and palm moist, and does most of the forage ball you just squeezed tend to hold together? This forage is just right for chopping, so get started.

Try this squeeze test. It can help you find a moisture level that is just right for making better silage.

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