

Inoculating Corn and Sorghum Silage

To make good silage, sometimes we need a little help from inoculants to improve fermentation.

Of all the topics I provide advice about, silage inoculants is one of the most difficult. There is no clear cut, consistent way to predict when inoculants will be most useful or cost effective. Silage fermentation is just too complex.

Inoculants primarily reduce storage losses. Fermentation starts and ends quicker with inoculated silage so more silage remains for feeding. Typically, you save an extra five percent. Some inoculants can improve feeding value, although results are a bit inconsistent.

Inoculants consistently improve wet silage, especially sorghum silage. If you start chopping early enough to prevent silage from being too dry at the end, inoculants should help. When you begin chopping, grab a handful and squeeze it tightly in your fist. If free juice squeezes from the forage, it is wet enough to benefit from use of an inoculant.

In the past, inoculants rarely improved properly made corn silage - silage at the right moisture, chopped fine, packed well, and sealed tight. Nor did they improve dry silage. But recently developed inoculants, with more effective strains of fermentation bacteria, are producing slightly better quality silage.

If you do use an inoculant, make sure that it contains live bacteria. Also check to see that the inoculant provides at least 100,000 colony forming units per gram of wet forage when applied at the recommended rate. You need plenty of live bacteria for the inoculant to do you any good. But used in the right conditions, inoculants can be worth it.

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