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BALING STALKS FOR WINTER FEED

What are corn stalk bales worth? One way to look at it is from the cost stand point. Nutrients removed by stalk bales may need to be replaced with extra fertilizer. Using this fall's prices, stalks contain about nine to ten dollars worth of nitrogen, phosphate, sulfur, and lime per ton.

Corn stalk removal also can reduce soil organic matter, increase erosion risk, and increase soil water evaporation. Nebraska research shows that dryland corn yield declines about two bushels for each ton of residue removed while irrigation cost increases similarly to maintain corn yield. That's another seven dollars or so per ton.

Baling stalks tends to cause much more wear and tear on equipment than other baling operations so labor and equipment costs average twenty to twenty-five dollars per ton. Totaled together, these costs amount to more than forty dollars for each ton of corn stalks removed.

So, what are corn stalks worth as a feed? One rule of thumb suggests the dollar feeding value is just a bit higher than straw. But feed value of stalks varies greatly, and cattle tend to waste more of it. If you bale the entire field you may only have three to four percent protein and less than fifty percent TDN. Harvest just the tailings in the two or three rows behind the combine and TDN increases to the lower fifties and protein to about five percent. But you should test to make sure.

So – are baled corn stalks worthwhile? These numbers suggest that it may be a toss-up, depending a lot on local feed supplies and your individual ability to either cut costs or feed efficiently.

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