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CORN STALK QUALITY AFTER WEATHERING

Here in the Great Plains, rain is usually a good thing. Even during winter it can aid survival of winter wheat and alfalfa. And snow can provide an insulating layer to protect from the coldest nights.

But rain, as well as melting snow, also reduces the feed value of corn stalks as well as winter pastures. And lately many fields have had some pretty significant moisture on those stalks and pastures.

Moisture reduces corn stalk quality several ways. Most easily noticed is how fast stalks get soiled or trampled into the ground when fields are muddy.

Less noticeable are nutritional changes. Rain soaks into dry corn stalk residue or winter grass and leaches out some of the soluble nutrients. Most serious is the loss of sugars and other energy-dense nutrients, which lowers the TDN or energy value of these already low energy forages. These same nutrients also disappear if stalks begin to mold or rot in the field or especially so in the bale. And as mold or spoilage occur, palatability and intake also decline.

Wind also is a problem. You've seen fencelines filled with corn husks blown off of nearby fields. These husks are the most nutritious part of the corn stalk so the best feed sometimes just blows away.

There is little you can do to prevent these losses. What you can do, though, is begin to supplement a little earlier than usual. Since weathering reduces TDN more than it reduces protein, consider the energy value of your supplements as well as protein content.

Weathered corn stalks and pasture still are economical feeds. Just supplement them accordingly.

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