

WEB CONTENT DISPLAY
August 10, 2012

DROUGHT ISSUES

SOYBEAN HAY: A frequent question at the Extension Office the past couple weeks when bean fields were not setting pods, was how about using soybeans for hay or silage? Soybeans can make hay equivalent to mid-bloom alfalfa hay (average quality alfalfa) but we do not recommend it.

So what's the problem? Drought stricken soybeans can be really short, and in most fields that bad you will still see last year's no-till corn stalks still sticking up. After paying the swather, the tedder, and the baler, the half-ton of hay per acre is break even at best. You would have to own your own equipment and even then think twice because how hard it is to keep the leaves on the hay.

If we have only four pods per plant and catch one good rain during seed fill, you would think we could harvest at least 5 bushels per acre of soybeans on our worst dryland spots or a \$50 per acre value after harvest costs and still have some field residue cover. I strongly recommend you keep the beans through to harvest. Consult you crop insurance agent before any thought of haying soybeans.

POTENTIAL NITRATE ISSUES IN CORN FORAGE: There will always be some risk for nitrates in corn fields stricken by drought. The majority of the nitrates will be in the lower 8 inches of the stalk. The nitrate levels are going to be the highest in corn which died before tasseling. When grazing early harvested fields or standing corn in very low appraisal areas, cows are selective grazers and will select the leaves, upper stalk, and ears first which means there will be less nitrates in those plant components. Manage grazing to avoid forcing cows to eat the bottom part of the corn plant and too much corn if there are ears on the ground.

The fermentation process occurring in corn silage reduces the nitrates in the feed by 50% on average. Cattle being fed a ration containing corn or milo grain like fed cattle or dairy are likely not going to be affected since the high energy diet will convert the nitrate to protein.

More caution needs to be taken with beef cows being fed low energy diets. Nitrate tests below 1000 ppm are considered relatively safe. 1000-2100 ppm is safe for non-pregnant animals. The most important factor in feeding any potential nitrate feed is to introduce the feed to the animals in stages. Add testing of the forages and blending with lower nitrate feeds for a complete program. Corn silage, hay, or grazed corn is excellent cattle feed and can be a part of any ration with proper consideration. In corn with no ear development, cutting height raised to 6 to 8 inches will reduce the amount of nitrates in the feed. Before feeding drought damaged corn silage, allow it to go through at least a 21-day fermentation period before feeding. Sending a forage sample in for analysis is encouraged. Shorter fermentation times may cause some of the nitrates to still be in the dangerous nitrite form, just like heated green chop.

EXTENSION DROUGHT RESPONSE: There is a new website that Extension has created to assist farmers, ranchers and farm businesses across the state. The education materials on drought

response are being located in one website. That is <http://droughtresources.unl.edu/>. The amount of information there is impressive and should handle most situations.

CORN STORAGE CHALLENGE: Corn test weight is a good indicator of corn storability. Corn that is below 54 pounds per bushel after it is dry should not be stored into warm weather next summer. It is more important that the corn be below 15 percent moisture and that regular air fronts keep the grain uniform in moisture. Lighter corn also will break more in handling, so be sure to remove a load or two of corn to remove fines from the bin core. It is also not wise to mix corn of different crop years in the same storage bin; the mix is less stable than each year's crop stored separately. Check your grain at least every two weeks, with some way to take grain temperatures. If a slow rise is noted, aerate and/or sell the grain. Hot spots can quickly involve grade changes for the entire bin.

FEED QUALITY: Assuming corn is not contaminated with mycotoxins, and other factors are not compromising quality of the corn, low test weight corn seems to be comparable in feeding quality to normal test weight corn for swine. It appears that corn with test weight as low as 45 lb/bushel, and maybe as low as 40 lb/bushel, can support pig performance similar to corn with test weights of 56 to 59 lb/bushel.

In a two-year research study from Nebraska, authors concluded that feeding low test weight corn of 46 lb/bu or greater resulted in similar results to feeding No. 2 corn to growing and finishing cattle. They found average daily gain and feed efficiency to be as good with the low test weight corn as the regular test weight corn when included in growing and finishing diets.

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