CORN STALK QUALITY AFTER WEATHERING – Jerry Volesky

Fall rain and snow are good for wheat and next year’s crops, but it does have its drawbacks. One challenge is its impact on corn stalk feed quality.

While this fall has been relatively dry, there has and will continue to be areas that receive some rain or snow events. Rain reduces corn stalk quality several ways. Most easily noticed is how fast stalks can get soiled or trampled into the ground if the fields become muddy.

Less noticeable are nutritional changes. Rain or melting snow soaks into dry corn stalk residue 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 the stalks. These same nutrients also disappear if stalks begin to mold or rot in the field or especially in the bale. Then palatability and intake also decline.

Another factor that affects cornstalk grazing is wind. Throughout the fall, there always seems to be those days where excessively high winds will easily blow corn leaves and husks off the field. This of course, can impact the amount of feed, and after grain, those leaves and husks contain the highest nutritional quality.

There is little you can do to prevent these losses. What you can do, though, is to closely monitor cow and field conditions while adjusting your supplementation program accordingly. Since weathering by rain reduces TDN more than it reduces protein, consider the energy value of your supplements as well as its protein content.

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

GRAZING CORN STALKS - Brad Schick

Having corn stalks to graze is a great resource for livestock producers. For dry cows, it is a relatively inexpensive feed that can typically meet or come very close to meeting nutritional needs. Grazing can also help get rid of corn remaining in the field and help reduce volunteer corn the following year.

Cattle primarily consume leaf, husk, and leftover corn. The stem or stalk makes up about 48.5% of the residue by dry weight, while the leaf blade and husk make up 39.6%. Cattle will consume leaf and husk if available. That diet will consist of 52 to 55% TDN (total digestible nutrients) and 5 to 5.5% crude protein.

When thinking about how long to graze corn residue, start your calculation as follows: For every bushel of corn produced, there is 16 lbs. of dry leaf and husk available immediately after grain harvest. If your grazing plan is to remove 50% of the leaf and husk, this leaves us with about 8
lbs. of good forage, on a dry matter basis, available to graze for every bushel of corn produced. This takes into account trampling, defecation, wind, and other losses. Therefore, if the field produced 200 bu. per acre, that’s 1600 lbs. of forage grazing per acre now available. A general stalk grazing rule is there is about 30 cow days per 100 bushels of corn produced.

What about assessing how much downed corn is in a field? Cattle need to be worked up on heavy corn diets and cows shouldn’t be allowed to eat more than 10-15 lbs. per day especially right away. To know how many bushels per acre are in the field, walk 100 feet in three places in the field. Count the ears you find between two rows and divide that number in half. That’s how many bushels per acre of downed corn.

Grazing corn stalks is a great resource and done right can really add value to any operation.