



# DAIRYINFO

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*Taking service to another level!*

## Silage Season is Here!

It is hard to believe that the 2014 silage season is here, when it seems like “only yesterday” we were cultivating and planting. The quality and quantity of the corn silage crop we put away this fall can chart an operation’s feeding success for an entire year. And as the harvest is completed, it is all the more critical that we take stock of our available forage inventories to help ensure there is sufficient feed for the entire farm throughout the coming fall and winter.

Here are some tips to keep in mind both before and during corn silage harvest:

- On warm, dry and breezy fall days, whole plant moisture can drop up to 2% day. If you have not already done so, check the maturity and moisture level of your corn. The goal is to aim for harvesting within the 30-35% dry-matter window.
- If you have a bumper crop and your forage base is not 100% corn silage, consider chopping stalks higher, for a higher energy corn silage product that can help you reduce your feed bill.
- Depending on whether or not you have a kernel processor, keep the theoretical length of cut between 3/8” (without processing) and 1.9 cm (with processing).
- Keep in mind all the ways “shrink” happens on the farm and take steps to minimize losses.
- When packing... don’t hurry and make sure you have enough tractor-weight to get the job done well: total tractor weight (for all continuously packing tractors) divided by 800 will equal the number of wet tons you can pack/hour.
- Oxygen exclusion will be maximized when: plastic is thicker; multiple layers are used; an oxygen barrier is included; and if the covering is adequately weighted down (tires should be touching).

Once the seeds are in the ground, your theoretical yield maximum is established. Good decisions (weed control, N rates, etc.) will keep you nearer that theoretical level maximum. The same can be said about corn silage quality. Once the corn is at the proper moisture for harvest, the quality maximum is established and it only goes down from there. Further, once it is in storage, there is a theoretical maximum quantity and quality that will actually be eaten by your cattle, and many places for it to be lost. As with most things, it is the little things that add up to make a big difference, such as poor silage-making and silo management practices, which can cause losses of up to 40% between the field and the digestive tracts of your cows. Here are some things you can do to reduce losses on your farm:

1. **Start on time:** Silage made from over-mature corn affects quality and can impact your bottom line. Watch the dry matter percentage of corn ahead of harvest.
2. **Cutting height:** Consider offsetting some of your cost by chopping higher than usual. This will result in a lower total yield. The choice may be between chopping

higher to improve quality and reducing the feed bill, or chopping low and having enough corn silage to sell. Depending on where you are, selling corn silage this year may not be as easy as in other years.

3. **Understand “shrink”:** Brian Holmes, a UW Extension agricultural engineer, demonstrates that even under ‘good management’ about 18% of the harvestable corn silage in a field never makes it into the digestive tract of an animal; with ‘not so good management’ almost 29% never makes it into an animal. He estimates that on an 85-cow dairy, the difference between 19 and 29% loss amounts to almost \$17,000/year! Sources of loss include harvest, filling, storage, feed-out and feeding practices.
  4. **Chopping length & kernel processing:** Fermentation is an anaerobic process. The more air space among particles in the silo, the more spoilage you can expect. Crop processors allow kernel-cracking to take place without having a suboptimal theoretical length of cut (TLC). Without a crop processor, a .95 cm TLC is necessary to adequately damage the kernel to optimize starch utilization in the system. With crop processors, the TLC can be increased without affecting starch digestibility. Increasing fiber length improves rumen health but can make achieving an optimal packing density more difficult. Kernel processing improves starch utilization and increases cob fragmentation to prevent sorting during feeding. Limin Kung, Jr. (University of DE) suggests that processing is adequate if 90-95% of kernels are cracked or crushed (70% less than 1/4 kernel size).
  5. **Packing:** Packing layers should be less than six inches thick to prevent excessive trapping of oxygen in the silage mass. If packing is your bottleneck, it is better to add weights to the tractor, add another tractor, or slow the chopper down rather than to inadequately pack the material into the bunker silo.
  6. **Covering to Exclude Oxygen:** Inadequate oxygen exclusion from the top can lead to storage losses over 30%! White plastic is better than black (lower temperature); thicker (8 mil) is better than thin (4 mil); two layers better than one, with an oxygen-barrier plastic as ideal. Weight down adequately.
- Track your silage harvest results and be sure to check forage inventories before winter sets in!

*(Edited from an article in Dairy Herd Management by Daniel Hudson, UVM Extension Agronomist)*

**SUMMER IS STILL HERE!  
READY FOR FALL PLANTING?  
W-S FEED... *quality & service!***

*Interested in discussing topics in this newsletter, or to do a better job feeding and managing your cows? Call us today.  
Our goal and commitment is to help you!*

**VOLUME 4 – Number 9 – September 2014**

# Coming...

Fall and winter are on the way, after a summer of variable temperatures and moisture levels. Some areas have experienced the extremes of drought, while others had flooding! As you begin to plan for the coming months and the onset of fall and winter, I can help you with necessary ration changes, and getting a comprehensive analysis of your silage and other forages. It is also time to think about purchasing seed for next spring, getting a "jump" on early order discounts that can impact your bottom line. It might be a good idea to make a checklist of what you need to accomplish ahead of time, so you are better prepared for the known challenges of fall and winter. Being prepared makes things a lot easier for you and your livestock!

**Call me today.**

**Plan Ahead For Fall & Winter!**

## **Forage inventories... ready for fall & winter!**

In a year of variable weather patterns, it is critical to know your forage inventories. Many areas had adequate (or excessive) rainfall, while others lacked the necessary rain to achieve good crop yields this year. Do you know what your forage inventories are going to be? Don't wait until fall (or winter) to check this out. Plan ahead if the possibility of a forage shortage exists. This can help save time, money and frustration. Once you have determined if there is a shortage and the amount of available forage you have to work with, then you can strategize how you are going to meet the needs and demands of livestock this coming fall and winter. Here are a few suggestions to consider, if forage shortages are possible on your farm:

- Plant specific forage crops this month! Check out what is available. Plant as soon as possible, if you need a fall cutting to aid supplies.
  - Locate [other] producers that have forages to sell! Make sure you purchase not only on price, but also on the overall quality and nutrient value of these forages.
  - Work closely with your W-S Nutritionist to determine the most effective ways of feeding what you have, whether home-grown or purchased forages.
  - Make sure all the cows in your herd are paying their way! This might be a good time to cull cows that are lagging or have not been profitable.
- Many possibilities exist that can help you through the coming months! I will be happy to work with you to discover the best solution for your situation.



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# **SEPTEMBER 2014**

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# **CHECK IT OUT!**