



A NEWSLETTER OF DAKOTALAND FEEDS

## What Does Silage Bring to the Table?

Silage cutting season is right around the corner. As we prepare for chopping, one thing we must consider is the value of the feed we are putting up.

There is a long-held practice of pricing corn silage at 10x the bushel price of corn. Many times, with the prices of grain and forage, that would seem to come pretty close to a reasonable price. When we look at alternative feeds, it isn't always as cut-and-dried as comparing on an energy and protein basis.

There are some things that corn silage brings to a ration that other feeds do not. For calves, the silage helps hold the ration together, not just with moisture, but with the high moisture roughage. If you have used water in your ration before, you know it helps to hold it together, but it is not the same as silage. The high energy roughage allows us to adjust calves to a higher energy ration without the risk of acidosis that grains can have. We could get the same energy in the ration with dry hay and grain, but the risk of acidosis would be increased because of the starch required to get to that energy level.

For cow rations, if we don't have silage, it often takes spiking in some grain to get to the necessary energy to meet their needs. We can also get cows to eat some pretty rough forage by mixing it with corn silage. Mixing silage with rough forage helps reduce our waste tremendously. If cows waste 20% of the hay you put in front of them, that increases the cost of that roughage by 20%. Even with lower priced hay, it adds up. For example, if hay is priced at \$75/T but 20% of it doesn't get consumed and is instead wasted by trampling or rotting, the actual cost of the hay to the cattle should be figured at \$90/T.

As farmer-feeders (or feeder-farmers), what is the best decision for our acres? Does it make sense to cut silage? Let's say that a field is estimated to yield 180 bu/ac. With cash price for October at \$3.30/bu, that would mean a gross value of \$594/ac. If we get one ton of silage per 7 bu per acre, we could estimate 25T of silage per acre. That generates a gross value of \$825/ac if we value silage at \$33/T.

Today, silage is likely worth more than that. When harvesting corn silage, it should be around 35% dry matter. That means in 1T of silage we have 700lbs of actual dry matter. Of that, about 50% is from corn grain and 50% is from roughage. If 350 lbs of that is corn grain, we correct to 85% dry matter (15% moisture) leaving us with 412 lbs of 15% moisture grain. That equals 7.3 bushels with a value of \$24.09. Hay markets are dropping with the supply seemingly abundant forage. If we value hay at \$85/T at 15% moisture, 412 lbs of hay generates a value of \$17.51. Added together, \$41.06 is the value. With silage valued at 10x the bushel price of corn, it makes sense to put up silage as compared to using corn grain and hay instead.

Putting up silage right does take some effort. The critical points are to chop at the right moisture of 65%, get a fine chop (5/8" theoretical length of cut), use a high quality inoculant, pack the pile with 800# of pack weight per ton unloaded per hour, shape the pile to pack all sides (make a drive-over mound), cover the pile with plastic and then feed out about 12" off the face of the pile each day.

It takes a lot of weight to get a pile packed effectively. If you have custom cutters coming in, you need to consider how much weight you need to try to get on that pile. If you shape the pile to make a drive-over mound, you have more room to get more weight on the pile. An extra tractor is a huge benefit to the density and quality of your silage. Often, a custom cutter can chop so fast that it is a challenge to get enough weight to do an adequate job packing. A drive-over mound will have a larger footprint than the wedge-shaped or bread loaf-shaped pile, however it is much easier to get extra weight on it.

### In a Nutshell:

- Silage is often priced at 10x the bushel price of corn
- Moisture from silage helps hold rations together
- Silage helps get cows to consume rough forage
- Gross value per acre is more for silage than grain
- Putting up quality silage takes effort
- Pack with 800# of weight per T unloaded per hour
- Cover the pile with plastic—syrup does not work

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Covering a pile with plastic is essential. SDSU did research investigating covering methods. When compared to covering silage with plastic, leaving a pile uncovered resulted in a loss of 48.3% dry matter over 108 days. Covering silage with distillers' syrup resulted in a loss of 57.4% over the same time frame. Covering with syrup resulted in higher loss than simply leaving it uncovered. Throwing tires is a crappy job but it works and is highly effective. If you aren't going to do it, then just keep your money and don't waste it on syrup.

It is a busy time of year and as you prepare for harvest, make sure to consider the value of the feed you are putting up and how you can get it put up well. With silage, you have to live with your sins all year until the next chopping season. Talk to your local feed consultant if you have questions about putting up silage.

*Roxanne Knock, PhD*

### ***What do you need to be thinking about this time of year?***

- Get your feed storage area ready for silage season and get your inoculant lined up
- **Order your Stress Care® for weaning** – planning ahead will help ensure you have it when you need it!
- Continue **creep feed** for your spring-born calves or consider switching to Ration Balancer or Accuration®
- Get your fall vaccination protocol or receiving protocol set with your veterinarian
- Clean water tanks prior to weaning, check pens, and perform maintenance
- Feed Altosid® or Clarifly® to control fly populations until the first frost
- Get mineral out to the cattle since forages are deficient in many trace minerals
- Talk to your veterinarian about ultrasounding or pregnancy checking so you can cull open cows earlier
- **Talk to your vet about getting a VFD prior to weaning if you plan to use Aureomycin**

**TO RECEIVE THIS VIA EMAIL, PLEASE SEND REQUEST TO: [ROXANNE@DAKOTALANDFEEDS.COM](mailto:ROXANNE@DAKOTALANDFEEDS.COM)**



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