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Dakotaland Feeds, LLC

A NEWSLETTER OF DAKOTALAND FEEDS

Silage

In a Nutshell:

- **Figure out how much you want to harvest**
- **Harvest silage to achieve 35% dry matter**
- **Talk to your custom cutter in advance**
- **Use a good inoculant to direct fermentation**
- **PACK the pile with 800# per T unloaded per hour**
- **Make a drive-over mound**
- **Cover the pile with plastic**
- **Try to feed off at least 12" from the face daily**

With the crops progressing, it will soon be time to cut silage. Best practices and some planning can help ensure that you have a healthy feed supply for the upcoming feeding season.

Part of pre-planning for silage season is to consider how much silage you will need or want. If you want to feed 15-20 lbs of silage to backgrounding calves, you should consider how many days you intend to keep them (and consider what you would think the longest possible feeding scenario would be). Then, it is also important to consider shrink. Many piles will shrink 20% or more. So if you figure on feeding 1,000 calves about 15 lbs/d for 90 days, that would mean you would need about 675 T of silage. At 20% shrink, you should put about 850 T in the pile. You can also go back through your feeding history or feed sheets to figure out your previous year's usage. If you have been using the Performance Beef platform, that should be easy to obtain.

When determining when to start harvesting, targeting 35% dry matter in the silage is ideal. Most of the time, that is close to ½ to 2/3 of the milk line. There is tremendously variability in this correlation to whole plant moisture, but it gives you a very rough guide. If the corn is significantly wetter, you will lose nutrients in seepage from the pile. If the silage is cut drier, it is more difficult to get a good pack and get all of the air out of the pile.

Often, dry down will occur at a rate around 0.6% per day depending on heat and humidity. If you are planning to hire a custom cutter to harvest your silage, be in touch with them about both timing and inoculant. Make sure if you are providing the inoculant to have it on hand. If they are providing the inoculant, make sure it is a quality product and discuss the cost.

When the chopper is ready to roll, the theoretical length of chop should be 5/8" for corn silage. If the silage gets driers, we need to try to chop it finer to help us get a better pack. The pile should not heat. Your silage pile should be within about 10 degrees of the air temperature the day you harvested. Heat indicates that we are losing nutrients as they are being consumed by undesirable fermentation. When we take a silage sample, we shouldn't need a glove because the silage is too hot to touch.

Inoculants like Biomax can help direct the fermentation so we can rapidly drop the pH and preserve nutrients. Typically, the silage will be through most of fermentation after about 3 weeks and the pH should be stable at that point. Quality inoculants help decrease the pH to a greater extent and faster than without an inoculant resulting in better quality silage with less spoilage.

Pack, pack, and pack the pile. If you don't get a good pack on the pile, you have wasted a lot of effort. The recommendation is 800# of pack weight per ton unloaded per hour. That is a lot of weight. One creative way producers have added pack weight include adding weight to an old drill to pack the pile. We are shooting for a pack density of about 40 lbs per cubic foot. When you think about that, a

cubic foot would be pretty close to the size of a salt block, and the density would be just slightly less. That is how tight we want the pile. If you can get there, the shrink on your pile will be substantially less than if it is not tightly packed. Remember that pushing and packing are not the same thing.

The shape of the pile makes a difference in how well you can get it packed. Making a drive-over mound versus a breadloaf-shaped pile allows you to pack more evenly. On the sides of a breadloaf-shaped pile, you can't pack at all and you have shrink loss and rot on the sides because of the oxygen in the pile.

Cover the pile with plastic. The physical barrier that plastic provides helps further reduce shrink and spoilage. You will have less shrink and less of that rotted layer on top to pitch away. Research from Kansas State shows that you lose 50% of the dry matter in the top three feet of an uncovered pile.

The value of corn silage has traditionally been valued at 10x the bushel price of corn. It generally holds pretty true to that value. With where the cash prices may be at during harvest, it could be a good year to put a little more in your silage pile and sell it on the hoof instead of by the bushel.

Trying to keep the feed fresh at feed-out is another key to reducing shrink and preserving quality. If you can feed about 12 inches off the face every day, you keep the feed fresh and get limited oxygen penetration into the face by removing that amount every day.

Silage is an important feed resource for many cattle producers. It helps us hold rations together and provides energy and roughage to our cattle. With silage, your sins live with you all year, so take the time to plan out your silage season so you have great quality feed for the upcoming year.

Roxanne Knock, PhD

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

- Clean water tanks prior to weaning, check pens, and perform maintenance
- Get your **Stress Care® starter product** on hand for weaning
- Inventory your projected feed resources & project your winter feed needs to plan accordingly
- Get your feed storage area ready for silage season and get your inoculant lined up
- Get creep feed out for spring-born calves
- **Talk to your vet about getting a VFD prior to weaning if you plan to use Aureomycin**
- Keep mineral in place for the cows on pasture—it enhances digestibility and most forage is deficient in minerals
- Get a pre-conditioning program in place and talk about vaccines, dewormer, and treatments with your vet
- Talk to your veterinarian about ultrasounding bred heifers for pregnancy and start feeding or sell the opens

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