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Making Good Quality Corn Silage

Corn silaging season has started in the Canadian Prairies. As this is a busy time for farmers and retails, below are a few quick tips to consider when cutting your corn silage crop.

Tips #1: Check the moisture

- Ideal whole plant moisture for corn silage harvest: 62-68% moisture (38-32% dry matter).
  - 62-68% moisture range can correlate with ½ to ¾ milk line progression, but doing a harvest sample is the best way to check whole plant moisture before cutting an entire field
- Different storage methods will require different ideal whole plant moistures for optimal ensiling conditions
- Approximate corn silage dry-down rate: 0.5%/day
  - Environmental conditions and hybrid characteristics can influence the dry down rate

Tip #2: Get the right chop length

- Target a theoretical length of cut (TLC) (aka target chop length) of ½ to 3/4”
- Silage chopped at the TLC will pack more firmly and result in increased palatability
  - Particles cut that are too course will reduce packing efficiency and can cause silage to spoil due to poor fermentation
  - Particles cut too fine can reduce palatability and is a less effective source of roughage

Tip #3: Packing the pit properly

- The purpose of packing the pit is to remove excess oxygen than can inhibit the ensiling process.
- Typical rule of thumb: 800lbs of tractor for every ton of silage delivered to the pit per hour
  - Want to pack approx. 6” of silage particles at a time too avoid the development of air pockets between layers

Tip #4: Cover the silage pit quickly

- The ensiling process relies on bacteria to produce lactic acid to “pickle” the silage and prevent the silage from spoiling and minimize loss
- Lactic acid-producing bacteria occur naturally on the chopped silage, but other bacteria are also present and are competing for the resources the lactic acid-producing bacteria require to “pickle” the chopped silage.
- Use oxygen barrier film and UV resistant plastic to cover the full bunker as quickly as possible
  - Large bunkers can talk 1-2 days to fill
  - Covering and sealing the bunker reduces dry matter loss and spoilage risk
- Once covered, weight down the plastic barrier – tires are commonly used

Unloading chopped silage in bunker.

Tip #5: Consider using bacterial inoculants

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- Lactic acid-producing bacteria occur naturally on the chopped silage, but other bacteria are also present and are competing for the resources the lactic acid-producing bacteria require to "pickle" the chopped silage.
  - These bacteria work in anaerobic conditions which is why getting the right chop length and good packing is critical
- Lactic acid-producing bacterial inoculants are alive and inactive until rehydrated with moisture from the chopped silage (one of numerous critical reasons for ideal harvest moistures) and can greatly improve ensiling process

> ***Consider this:*** *Bacterial inoculants may have a greater benefit on corn silage particles that are* ***immature, damaged from heat*** *and* ***drought stress*** *or* ***has had exposure to heavy frost***

- Depending on the operation, a lactic acid-producing bacteria inoculant may not be necessary but a hetero-fermenting bacteria (L. buchneri) can be used to increase improve bunk face management

Packing the pit.

Additional Reading

› **Website:** https://myfarmlife.com/livestock/3-best-tips-for-packing-silage-piles/

› **Website:** https://wayne.osu.edu/sites/wayne/files/imce/5%20Key%20points%20to%20make%20high%20quality%20corn%20silage.pdf

› **Podcoast:** https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/ladies-and-gentleman-boys-and-girls-its-chow-time/id1518350369?i=1000490025865

September CHU (Corn Heat Unit) Update

May 1 – Sept 11, 2021

MANITOBA		SASKATCHEWAN		ALBERTA	
Carman	2466	Weyburn	2492	Barnwell	2415
Brandon	2444	Saskatoon	2413	Oyen	2388
Altona	2664	Moose Jaw	2429	Red Deer	2172

› MB CHU Resource | › SK CHU Resource | › AB CHU Resource

On behalf of **PRIDE Seeds** and **Canterra Seeds** teams, all the best with harvest and stay safe!

Keep an eye out for **2021 trial data** on **www.prideseed.com** coming soon!

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