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Making Good Quality Corn Silage

Proper harvest management is critical for producing high quality corn silage. Below are a few quick tips to consider when harvesting your corn silage.

Tips #1: Check the whole plant moisture

- Ideal whole plant moisture for corn silage harvest is 62-68% moisture (38-32% dry matter) (for horizonal bunker storage)
- 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 1/2 to 3/4”
- Silage chopped at the TLC of 1/2 to 3/4” will pack more firmly and result in increased palatability
  - Course particles will reduce packing efficiency and can cause silage to spoil due to poor fermentation
  - Particles cut too fine can reduce palatability and can result in a less effective roughage source

Tip #3: Use a bacterial inoculant

- 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. Other bacteria are also present which 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
- 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.

Tip #4: Pack the pit properly

- The purpose of packing the pit is to remove excess oxygen than can inhibit the ensiling process
- Tractor weight and layer depth is critical for good packing
  - Tractor weight: the fill rate (tons/hour) should not be greater than the weigh of the tractor (lbs) divided by 800
    - Example: if the tractor weights 40,000 lbs, the fill rate should not exceed 50 tons/hour (40,000/ 800 = 50)
  - Layer depth: fresh silage should be packed in 6” layers on the packed bunker to avoid the development of air pockets between layers

Tip #5: Cover the silage pit quickly

- Use oxygen barrier film and UV resistant plastic to cover the full bunker as quickly as possible
  - Large bunkers can take 1-2 days to fill
  - Covering and sealing the bunker reduces dry matter loss and spoilage risk
- Once covered, weigh down the plastic barrier – tires are commonly used

Additional Reading

› **Website:**
3 Best Tips for Packing Silage Piles - FARM LIFE

› **Article:**
Key points to make high quality corn silage - Ohio State Extension

› **Podcast:**
DFD Podcast: Ladies and gentleman, boys and girls... It’s Chow Time!!

› **Website:**
Maximize corn silage packing density - Dairy Star

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

Corn silage and grazing data will start being posted to the website soon **www.prideseed.com**

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