

FORAGER



Agronomics with livestock in mind!

In the Field – Dealing With Drought-Stress

Crops throughout the northeast are variable to say the least. Timely rains in some areas have blessed many, but many more are feeling the effects of a hot July with no rain. Dry conditions and low milk prices are leaving many farmers discouraged. There are a number of options available to help with many of these concerns.

A forage shortage is the biggest concern facing many farmers this year. Right now, producers should start assessing their yield potentials and inventories for the winter. For standing corn, estimate 1 ton per foot of height of wet silage yield (70% moisture) per acre for corn without ears or poorly pollinated ears. This estimate may be high for corn less than 3 feet tall. For the most part this year hay crops have shown strong yields due to timely rains, until the last few weeks. If have forage shortages are anticipated consider the following items, after evaluating inventories.

- Review crop insurance policies and contact your agent to avoid any surprises. Do this early so you will have funds ready and available to purchase forage when it comes up for sale.
- Contact local crop farmers in your area to find out if they will have corn or other crops that they will be harvesting for silage due to their lack of grain yield.
- Seed fields down this fall with small grains to take off a late fall cutting, and/or an early spring cutting for supplemental forage.
- Plan ahead for next spring to plant short season corn hybrids on fields that can be planted early to get at least a partial corn silage crop as early as possible next year.

Remember, there are a lot more options for producers to obtain available forage now than there will be in 6 months!

Consult the Renaissance “Drought-Stressed Corn” flyer, for information about how to decide when to harvest and how to handle drought stressed corn.

The Affects of Compaction

Growing crops is always a gamble. There are so many variables that are out of our control. This year’s drought is a prime example of this. With all these uncontrollable variables, we need to make sure our management practices are not compounding things. Compaction is an extremely important issue that is often overlooked. Many fields across the northeast appear to be receiving more traffic than Daytona Speedway. An increased use of trucks for hauling silage, as well as custom harvesters has resulted in a lot of random travel across fields.

Compaction results in higher losses than are usually realized. A study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that alfalfa yields can be reduced up to 70% by wheel traffic, with an average yield reduction of 30% due to wheel traffic (Dan Undersander, Extension Forage Specialist). In corn, countless fields with shorter, extremely stressed headlands demonstrate the effects of compaction.

Compaction breaks up soil aggregates. It creates impermeable layers, which limit air and water movement as well as root growth. In alfalfa fields, traffic can crush crowns, limiting regrowth.

Producers need to consider the effects from compaction when traveling across fields.

- Avoid traveling across fields if possible.
- Minimize the weight of equipment used, removing weights, loaders, etc. when they are not needed.
- Use larger equipment to minimize the number of passes that must be made across a field.
- Travel on field edges or areas designated as roadways, and avoid hauling in random patterns across fields.
- Use floatation equipment when possible.
- Minimize tillage. Multiple tillage passes can create compacted layers.
- Avoid traveling on or working wet fields.

Small changes in traffic patterns across fields can improve yields and increase stand life in perennial crops.