

# FORAGER



*Agronomics with livestock in mind!*



## COUNTDOWN TO SILAGE HARVEST

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On many dairy farms corn silage harvest will begin in the next few weeks. Since corn silage is the foundation for many dairy rations, its important to manage the crop to maximize the quality of forage that is preserved. This is especially important this year since the quality of much of our hay crop silages is less than ideal. Consider these points during silage harvest this year:

Chop at the right moisture content for your silo. Measure crop moistures to be sure. This year crop maturity will likely be delayed. Start monitoring crop moistures prior to harvest- then estimate harvest with a dry-down rate of 0.5%/day. This gets everyone thinking about silage harvest ahead of time.

Consider the harvest height in your silage harvest. Harvesting one foot higher reduces yields about 8-10%, but increases the energy content and fiber digestibility and also results in a forage that is about 2% drier. This could be an advantage in some situations and allow for a 3-4 day earlier start to the harvest.

Monitor particle size during harvest. For processed corn silage, start with a ¾ inch theoretical length of cut (TLC) and 1-3 mm roller clearance. Do not chop processed silage too fine. For unprocessed silage shoot for 3/8 to 3/4 inch TLC with a finer cut on drier silage. Ideally, monitor particle size distribution during harvest with a Penn State Particle Separator.

Monitor cob and kernels in processed silage. Cobs should be broken into 1/8 concentric rings and kernels should be broken in several pieces.

Pack bunker silos thoroughly. University of Wisconsin ag engineers suggests a rough target of 800 pound of packing tractor for every ton/hr that silage is delivered to the silo. So a 40 ton/hr delivery rate would translate into 32000 pound tractor requirement. Silage moisture, chop length and the depth of spreading the silage can influence this requirement- some folks seem to get by with lower weight tractors.

Try to fill rapidly and continuously and then cover the silo with plastic immediately. Weight the plastic with tires or split tires or sidewalls laid down end to end. The split tires are gaining in popularity and have several advantages: easier to handle, less habitat for mosquitoes and rodents, and are just as effective.

Consider segregating early and late-planted silage crops if it helps with ration formulation. Later planted, lower grain silage could be targeted for heifers and other livestock with lower energy requirements.

## IN THE FIELD – Winter Grains for Silage

Fall planting of winter grains will provide feed early next spring. Rye, Barley, Wheat, and Triticale can all be taken off for silage in early to mid spring. These crops can make fields productive between fall harvest and spring planting when most land is lying fallow. Planting occurs from early September through mid October for these crops in most areas. Recommended planting dates for specific crops and specific areas vary. Planting rates for each are as follows.

Crop	Lbs/acre
Winter Rye	85-140
Winter Barley	120-150
Winter Wheat	100-150
Winter Triticale	100-120

Triticale or wheat can be no-tilled into alfalfa stands as well to boost first cutting yields. The University of Maryland has done some work showing the benefits of interseeding triticale into alfalfa stands at a rate of 80 lbs/acre of triticale, significantly increasing yields.

Harvest timing will vary between crops. Small grains should be harvested in the boot stage for silage. Most years, rye is ready in late April, barley in early May, and wheat and triticale in early to mid May; however, these dates may vary from year to year, and region to region. Fertilizing should be based on a farms nutrient management plan.