

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Headline: During Drought, consider baling corn silage

CASSVILLE, MO – Corn silage is a staple to dairy cattle rations, often comprising about half of the ration for confinement dairy cattle in Southwest Missouri. High quality silage is difficult to replace in the ration because it serves as both a forage to keep the rumen satisfied yet it also provides energy from the grain.

This growing season has been difficult for many stands. Barry Co. has received just two inches of rainfall since June 1st, according to a COCORAHS rain reporter near Purdy, MO. Some areas have had less, as rainfall this growing season has been spotty.

“Drought-stressed stands of corn are beginning to, or have already began to tassel” says Reagan Bluel, dairy specialist and county program director for University of Missouri – Extension of Barry Co. “Without rain during this critical phase, corn ears won't develop properly.”

“Although silage made from drought-stressed corn will not be as good as normal, we can still capture some feeding value if producers act fast to bale before the plant burns up.” Says Bluel. Those without chopping equipment, might consider using the baler they have on hand.

In 2016, a Lawrence county dairyman baled a test plot of corn for silage in collaboration with University of Missouri - Extension, S&H Farm Supply, and Crown Power of Monett. Two balers used included newly available crop cutting technology, while the third baler was a standard baler.

Corn was mowed with a roller mower. This method helped keep cobs intact on plants and not left in the field. This type of mower also allowed the corn to fall in rows to accommodate the baler without tedding or raking.

Corn wilted in the field until it reached 75% moisture. Corn was baled, net wrapped then wrapped in white plastic. These bales then underwent fermentation until early October.

“The fermentation profile was remarkably similar to typical corn silage,” Said Bluel. At feedout, cows wasted little feed and milked well.

The project demonstrated that baled corn is a viable feed solution. While not economically feasible in 2016 (a normal growing season) perhaps under drought conditions, may be the only feasible option for some growers.

Some items to consider:

1. Visit your local Extension office to ensure drought stressed corn is not high in nitrate, prior to baling.
2. Moisture is critical to ensure an appropriate fermentation profile. Too dry, won't pack out oxygen and too wet will encourage clostridia production resulting in moldy/slimy silage.
3. Forage corn tonnage varies little after tassling - waiting is not advantageous.
4. At feed out – cows will likely require energy supplementation to support lactation. Work with your nutritionist or local livestock specialist to ensure the ration is balanced to meet your herd's needs.
5. Check with your insurance agent prior to harvesting grain corn for silage.

For additional information call your local extension agent or the Barry Co. Extension office at 417-847-3161.

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