

# Everything you always wanted to know about...silage

LANCASTER — Covering all there is to know about silage in 30 minutes was no easy task for Penn State Extension Beef Specialist Les Burdette on Tuesday as he addressed the participants of Lancaster County Cattle Feeders' Day. But the big Penn Stater encapsulated his years of knowledge into a small statement: "Silage increases beef per acre."

Addressing the difficulties of ensiling forages, Burdette explained that forages, like alfalfa, lack the carbohydrates needed for silage fermentation. He recommended that forages be wilted to 60-70 percent moisture to equal 700 pounds of dry matter per ton.

Burdette suggested that if beef feeders add 5-6 pounds of grain to their alfalfa silage, the nutritive level would equal one pound of soybean meal plus corn silage for a 500-650 pound steer. The best time



Lester Burdette

to "shovel" forage silage into cattle is during the lightweight, growing period, said Burdette — under 700 pounds for the English breeds and under 800 pounds for the exotics.

"When alfalfa hay is above \$80 a ton," emphasized Burdette, "it's more profitable to sell the alfalfa

than feed it to steers."

Corn is a "natural silage fermenter," said Burdette, adding that preservative additives are "seldom justified."

However, Burdette reviewed the addition of non-protein nitrogen to corn silage, citing a 4-5 percent improvement in protein value as a result. He recommended adding 7-8 pounds of anhydrous ammonia per ton of corn silage of 60-72 percent moisture. Other additives mentioned by Burdette included minerals, such as limestone and dicalcium phosphate at the rates of 10-15 pounds per ton and 10-12

pounds per ton, respectively. Sulfur, too, can be added to corn silage fed to heavy cattle through gypsum or sodium sulfate at 8 pounds per ton. Burdette recommended one part sulfur be added to every 15 parts NPN.

"Don't feed lightweight cattle under 600 pounds NPN until all their protein needs are met naturally," cautioned Burdette. He advocated leaving part of the corn silage (15 feet, or so) in an upright silo untreated so that cattle will have a period of adjustment until the silage unloader hits the NPN-treated layers.

Burdette told the cattle feeders that they will realize the greatest average daily gain in steers when the ration contains only 25 percent roughage. With less roughage in the diet, the ADG drops back, but Burdette noted there will be a savings on feed handling and bulk. "Overhead costs, such as price of interest, dictate feeding 25 to 50 percent of the ration's dry matter as grain," said Burdette. He challenged the farmers to strive for a goal of a 2.4 ADG or higher for cattle started at 600-700 pounds, or 2.2 for cattle started at 400-500 pounds.—S.M.

## Is preconditioned calf worth cost?

LANCASTER — Feedlot death losses in feeder calves can be cut substantially if cattle breeders precondition the calves before selling them to cattle feeders. This idea, although not new, was reinforced Tuesday during the Lancaster Cattle Feeders' Day.

Penn State's Les Burdette explained that a preconditioned calf is one that:

- is weaned for at least 21 days;
- is ear tagged;
- is vaccinated for IBR, PI3, blackleg, and optionally BVD, clostridial, and H. Somnus;
- is debrubbed and deloused;
- is introduced to dry feed;
- has a veterinarian's certificate.

Burdette said that farmers who buy calves that are suffering from dehydration should provide them with unlimited water, good hay, and 2-3 pounds of feed as soon as they'll eat. Good quality silage can be added to the diet after the first day.

Burdette cautioned against feeding nonprotein nitrogen to young calves, but pointed out the feed should contain salt, calcium and phosphorus. He stressed visually checking feeder calves, keying in on any calves that are "hollow-sided," or that display drooping ears or rapid and labored breathing.

When handling newly arrived (Turn to Page A25)

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