CORN TALK NEWS
PENNSYLVANIA MASTER CORN GROWERS ASSOC., INC.

It Pays To Pack To Prevent Silage Spoilage

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LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Proper moisture testing is the key to making good forage, said Dr. Jerry Berger, director of technical services for the silage inoculant product line at Pioneer.

Berger spoke at the recent Pennsylvania Corn Conference about methods producers can use to troubleshoot high-moisture corn and corn silage problems.

Berger insists that the biggest and most consistent problem he encounters from producers involve not matching the hybrid moisture requirements correctly to the type of storage used.

In any case, Berger said, "it pays to pack, even in an upright" type of structure. He said that dry matter (DM) losses can be excessive if silage is too loose, because oxygen is the prime factor in DM degradability.

Proper moisture testing is the key to making good forage, said Dr. Jerry Berger, director of technical services for the silage inoculant product line at Pioneer, at the recent Pennsylvania Corn Conference.

He showed some of the results of tests that proved DM losses can be excessive, even during one day time. Completely loose silage lost up to 2 percent DM in one day, and in four days, 15 percent was lost.

"Pack the silage firmly and get the oxygen out," he told them. He said there are no shortcuts to ensuring DM retainability through packing. Many producers fail to cover bunkers properly, even when using tires. Tires should be used end to end, leaving all spaces covered.

Also, silage moisture should be tested periodically to ensure the levels present do not exceed the recommendations.

Too many times, problems are caused by improper moisture levels (greater than 13 percent); humidity levels (greater than 70 percent); temperature (above 55 degrees F.); a pH more than 5; and, of course, oxygen.

Also, chip size should be ⅜ inch; often, silage particles in problem areas are as long as 1½ inches.

"You can't do enough moisture testing," said Berger. "You should check moisture every week."

For other problems, including molds, it is important that a good test amount should be sent to the laboratory for analysis. When doing so, the producer should check the silage to observe distribution in the tower or bunk, and look for compaction or structural problems. Six locations should be used, with a sample taking from one to two feet deep.

For nutrient analyses, the sample should be refrigerated. But for molds, the test sample should not be refrigerated.

Problems can be resulting from other sources, including improper structure for the silage, slow feedout (especially in a smaller herd size than anticipated); poor distribution; and poor packing.

Using Manure

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worth to you.

After you have determined the nutrient value of the manure, it is a matter of estimating the trucking and application costs and comparing this to the value of the manure. Some manure producers are equipped to offer delivery or application service. Since poultry manure is very high in nutrient value, many find it profitable to haul it a substantial distance.

Lancaster County poultry manure is being trucked to farms in New Jersey and further to fertilize crops. If trucking of the manure can be arranged as a back haul with another trip, the potential distance that it can be hauled economically increases.

If you are going to be using manure as your source of corn crop nutrients, remember to calculate the rate of manure needed in accordance with sound nutrient management principles. If you have been using manure for a number of years, don't forget to calculate the residual nitrogen carryover from previous years' applications of manure and deduct that from the current year's nitrogen needs. Refer to Table 21 in "The 1993-1994 Agronomy Guide" to determine the residual nitrogen in your situation.

In order to assist potential manure suppliers and receivers in contacting each other, lists of each group have been compiled. These lists are organized by county and township to enable you to find those on the opposite list who are closest to you.

If you would be interested in having your name added and receiving an updated list annually, contact Leon Ressler, Penn State Extension, 1383 Arcadia Road, Lancaster, PA 17601-3149, (717) 394-6851.

Pa. Master Corn Growers Association