

First in Forage**New York Dairy Finds Careful Hybrid Selection Boosts Milk Production At No Extra Cost**

What's it worth to plant corn hybrids scientifically screened for their feeding qualities?

Enough to cover the cost of all crop inputs for a year, according to the owners of a 1,000-cow New York dairy.

"We figure the hybrids we plant for corn silage increase milk production by 4 lbs. or more per day," says Weir Stewart (left in photo), a partner at Odyssey Farm near Copake Falls, N.Y. "In our operation, that's enough to cover the entire cost of fertilizer, seed and planting for one year.

"We discovered what differences in corn-silage feeding quality could mean to our bottom line in 1991," continues Stewart. "That's when we learned that Cargill Hybrid Seeds had done considerable research to screen hybrids for feeding quality. So we tried some.

"There was a definite drop in production when we ran out of the silage from the Cargill hybrids and began feeding other silage. We also discovered that we could plant hybrids that were highly digestible and also yielded excellent tonnage per acre.

"We've learned that a quality forage program is extremely important to maximize milk production," says Stewart. "It's very difficult to overcome poor forage quality, even when you add the expense of a good supplementation program."

Since 1987, many dairy and beef producers who planted Cargill hybrids have related similar experiences to those at Odyssey Farm. That's the year Cargill Hybrid Seeds began selecting and screening hybrids through an extensive evaluation program for corn silage.

Selected for Profit Potential

Hybrids are selected on the basis of their potential to increase the profitability of livestock operations by enhancing forage yield, reducing feed supplement costs and improving animal performance. Hybrid offerings cover 80- to 120-day maturities.

The research shows repeatable differences in important quality characteristics such as whole plant digestibility, neutral detergent fiber, fiber digestibility, non-fiber carbohydrates and crude protein.

Odyssey Farm managers found the research especially important to their operation since they prefer feeding rations with higher amounts of corn silage than haylage. Corn silage is easier to manage from both a crop-production and feeding standpoint, they say.

"It's difficult to harvest alfalfa with consistently high feed value in an operation this large," says partner Bob Kimmel (right in photo). "Alfalfa must be cut and harvested several



times a year and it can be difficult to harvest at the best time for maximum quality. Corn silage needs to be harvested only once during the growing season so total labor and equipment costs are less. The time available to harvest quality corn silage is much wider than the time available to harvest haylage.

"Good-quality forage is the basic building block of any ration," he adds. "I've been involved in the dairy business for more than 25 years, and I've learned that cows are more healthy and give more milk when they eat more. Those that are eating the most dry matter are usually the healthiest. A highly digestible ration can affect milk production, improve health and improve breed-back and conception rates."

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