

forage before



FORAGE QUALITY PROGRAM < **EIGHT YEARS BETTER SE**

Hybrid Selection Pays Dividends for New York Dairy

Planting corn hybrids that are scientifically screened for their feeding qualities is proving to be extremely valuable for a 1,000-cow New York dairy. In fact, Odyssey Farm, Copake Falls, is saving enough to cover the cost of all crop inputs for a year.

"We figure the hybrids we plant for corn silage increase milk production by 4 lbs. or more per day," says partner Weir Stewart (left in photo). "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 has done considerable research to screen hybrids for feeding quality."

"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 Cargill 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 good supplementation."

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.

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 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," Kimmel 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."

Milk Production Increases When

If milk production increases while herd size expands, that indicates that the cows are probably being fed right. Young cows reach peak production faster and they maintain that peak longer.

Lee Hoover, Jr., Boiling Springs, Pa., increased his herd's production and held solids and milkfat yields while expanding the herd from 40 to 65 milking cows.

"High quality corn silage plays a key role in our feeding program," says Hoover. "It reduces feed costs and improves the cows' appetite."

Hoover, now in his third year

growing corn for silage recommended by the Cargill Corn Silage Menu, likes the fact that these hybrids are screened and selected through an extensive evaluation program.

"I tried a couple of bags the first year," he recalls. "It worked so well that I planted more the next year. The cows really like the silage. Intake



Hybrids Pack More Feed Value

Fred England knows the value of high-quality roughage as well as the importance of dry matter intake for efficient milk production.

"High-quality corn silage can make a big difference in milk production because it's a major economical source of energy," says England, Williamsburg, Pa. "Good silage keeps the cows eating. Their intake level remains more consistent to better satisfy their total nutrient needs."

The 1993 and 1994 crop seasons convinced England to pay more attention to the hybrids he planted for silage.

For several years he'd been interested in producing silage higher in feed value and digestibility. Like so many other producers, he figured that corn varieties that look good while they're growing and produce high grain yield could also yield high-quality silage.

England has found it very difficult to identify hybrids that produce consistent high yields of grain with the right balance of stalk dry-down, ear moisture and total digestibility.

"The Cargill Corn Silage Menu made sense when I first heard about it," he says. "I figured it was worth a try even though I was somewhat doubtful it would work."

However, England discovered that the Cargill hybrids recommended for silage proved to be much better than the others he's tried.

"As soon as we started feeding silage from the Cargill corn I



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