

Drought-Year Feed Dangers Under Scrutiny

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Craig provided an observation that he had heard several weeks ago: "When praying for rain, don't complain about the mud," he said, which can apply to a lot of conditions in the state, particularly in the southeast. The corn-growing season is over, and maximizing nutritional qualities of silage will be critical from now until the next growing season.

Growers need to watch for mold, fungus, virus, and harmful bacteria. It is critical to get the silage into the silo or bunker as quickly as possible, pack it to remove oxygen from the stored material, and to ensure proper fermentation is taking place.

Temperatures have to be just right in the ensiled material. Too high a temperatures aren't good. "We don't want compost," said Craig. "We want pickles."

Craig noted that the 1999 corn silage crop, in many locations "less than ideal," could use an inoculum to help the ensiling process. But Craig cautioned that you can't simply throw a cup of bacteria or other additive on the pile and hope for the best. The material has to be worked into the entire pile, sprayed on and spread out, as much as possible, to get the beneficial effect.

Asetic or proprionic acids

sometimes are added to drop the pH of the material. But silage managers have to be careful and on the lookout for the development of fungus which can generate mycotoxins — deadly to animals — in feed. To ensure fermentation continues and to prevent mold development, perhaps the final layer in a bunk should be laced with an acid-based material to ensure improved "pickling" of the silage.

Also at the Expo, Greg Roth, Penn State corn specialist, spoke about optimum plant densities for corn silage. Also, John Rutherford, multicounty farm management agent, and Al Shoener, Schuylkill County agronomy agent, spoke about pricing silage, forage, and high moisture corn and using, managing, and pricing custom farm operators.

Marvin Hall, Penn State forage specialist, spoke about forage quality at the site. At different seeding rates, through various Penn State studies, two-year research has found that forage quality was no different at any seeding rate for alfalfa.

At the Krall site, there was no difference in yield from 9-24 pounds per acre. Hall noted the ideal seeding rate is 15-18 pounds per acre. At 12-24 pounds, he said, "you'd be hard-pressed to tell much difference."



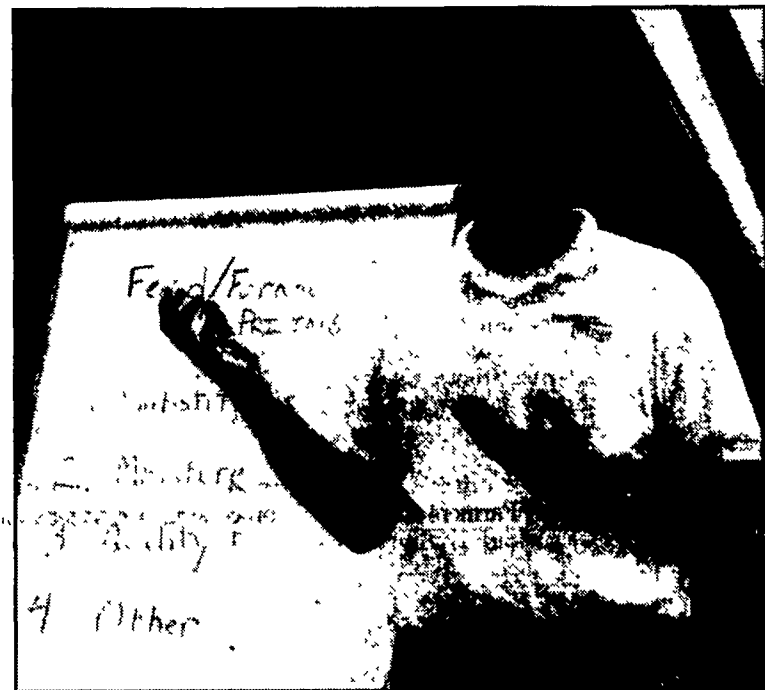
Several different forage harvesters were demonstrated by a variety of companies during the field day. Some of the harvesters were self-propelled with kernel processors. Here Glen Krall, right, and Brian Kreider, Lebanon, inspect the work. Photo by Andy Andrews

Bill Curran, Penn State weed specialist, spoke about the emerging biotechnologies in corn, including the bioengineered Roundup Ready varieties, Liberty Link varieties, and IMI IT/IR varieties. The ideal time to spray Roundup for Roundup Ready varieties is 4-6 weeks after planting, when weeds are six inches tall.

The Krall dairy, according to Glen Krall, includes 112 acres, but the family farms a total of 400 acres. The Kralls manage about 100 registered and grade Holstein.

Glen, Linda, Jason, 25, and Stacy, 21, manage the farm.

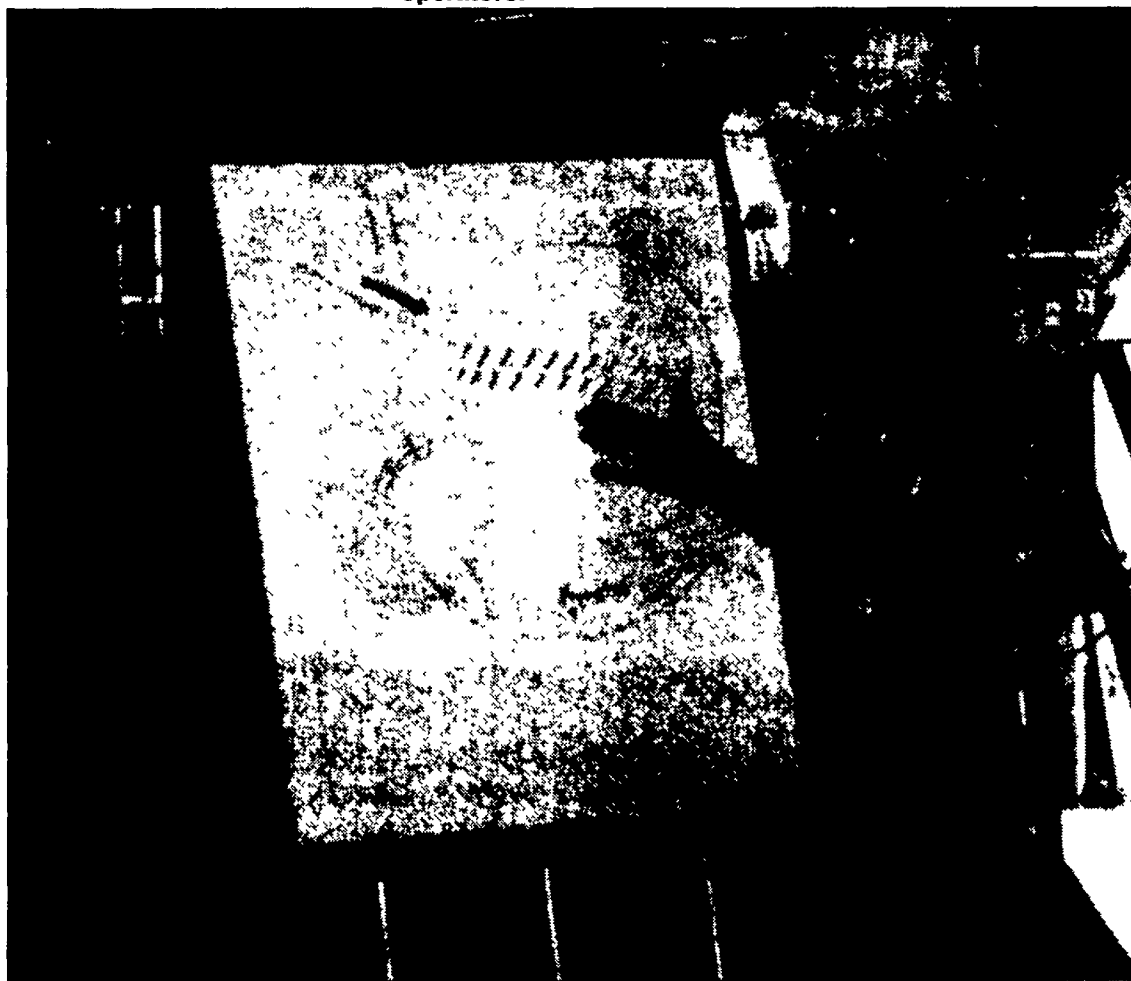
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Glen Krall, bottom, consults with self-propelled forage harvester driver Dale Balmer, Elizabethtown, at the Expo.



To get more out of silage, according to Dr. David Wolfgang, director of field investigations for the Pennsylvania Animal Diagnostic Laboratory System and Penn State dairy specialist, "chop it finer and make it wetter," he said.