

OUR FIRST Y2K GLITCH - POOR FERMENTATION OF FORAGES

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Producers - dairy and beef - have been faced with ongoing problems related to poorly fermented forages.

The main complaints have been animal deaths related to clostridial spoilage (botulism) and a rise in the

number of cows with displaced abomasum.

The mild weather of the fall and early winter has resulted in silages that are continually heating, have a short bunk life, have large pockets of spoiled material, and are showing a high pH. Problems will get worse as the weather becomes warmer.

The characteristics of clostridial silage are a pH above 5, ammonia nitrogen greater than 10 percent of the total nitrogen, more butyric

than lactic acid, and a strong rancid odor. Unfortunately, there are no magic antidotes to incorporate into rations to correct the effects of clostridial fermentation. This type of fermentation can occur in any type of storage structure, including round bales. In many cases, animals will go off-feed or dry matter intakes will be reduced. This can increase the incidence of health and metabolic problems around calving and into lactation. The only solution is to reduce or remove the feed from the ration. However, in many cases this may be the main forage source for the herd.

Alternatives to feeding spoiled silage is to limit feed or eliminate it from close-up dry cows and post fresh animals. These animal groups are generally under the most stress and susceptible to feed related problems. Good quality mixed alfalfa-grass hay could be purchased to help dilute the effects of the spoiled silage. Any obviously spoiled material should be discarded and not fed to any group of animals.

More byproduct ingredients could be incorporated to replace some of the forage. If silages are heating, then more frequent feeding throughout the day may be necessary. Some animals appear to be more sensitive to heated silages than others. Any

strategy to promote dry matter intake around the transition period should be implemented.

There have been some reported cattle deaths related to botulism. Botulism occurs when animals consume feeds that contain a toxin produced by the bacteria Clostridium botulinum. This has been seen recently in some beef herds, but dairy cattle can be affected as well.

In many cases, more than one animal becomes sick. They usually show signs of weakness, muscular incoordination, coma, and then death. How quickly animals show symptoms of being sick or die depend on how much of the toxin has been consumed.

A veterinarian should be called immediately. The suspect feed should be removed from the ration. Any ensiled forage with a high pH (>5.0) should be considered suspect.

Many of the animal health problems that producers deal with are forage quality related. This year's forages, regardless of silage additive use or proper filling procedures, are showing signs of poor fermentation due to unusual weather conditions. It is difficult to acknowledge that a forage product that one has spent time and money to produce may have little feed value.

Grazing Walks Set

J. CRAIG WILLIAMS
Penn State Extension
Tioga County

Following is the schedule for several grazing events.

2000 Bradford County
Grazing Network Schedule
Contact Glenn Gorrell, (570) 569-2624.

- May 3 — Dale Neufeld — Seasonal grazing/Solar Pump Water System — 265-4072.

- May 17 — Dean Madigan — Heifers On Pasture — 265-3799.

- May 28 — Glenn Gorell — Grazing Summer Annuals — 569-2624.

- July 12 — Jim Warburton — Grazing Brassicas — 924-3984.

- August 9 — Foster Constable — Late Summer Pasture/Cow Management — 833-2319.

- August 23 — Rob Moore — Open-Air Milking System — 699-7968, 699-3702.

- September 6 — Dick Packard — Grazing Alfalfa — 297-3676.

- September 20 — Terry Hoyt — 2 Years Later/Windmill Water System — 363-2805.

- October 4 — TBA.

- November 8 — Banquet — TBA.

2000 Tioga County
Pasture Walk Schedule

Contact Jim Weaver, (570) 724-7788, or Tioga County Extension, (570) 724-9120.

- May 6 — Frank Hartley — New Pasture Layout Trout Run.

- June 17 — Brian Helfrich & Lynn Wigglesworth — Land planning is a basic tenant of Holistic Management. Setting up a small dairy on a shoestring. Working on direct marketing & value added dairy products — 724-7839.

- July 22 — Robby England — 549-5661.

- August 19 — Erick Coolidge — 724-7778.

- September 16 — Don Chamberlain — Have been in and out of the dairy business for many years. Have tried many different methods to make a profit in this changing field. Come get a feel for the history of dairying in the Northern Tier — 549-4721.

- October 21 — Dave Johnson — Took the plunge to dairy farming in a big way. 1st time dairy farmers doing it seasonal. Now, in the middle of the grazing slump find out where they are — 324-2285.

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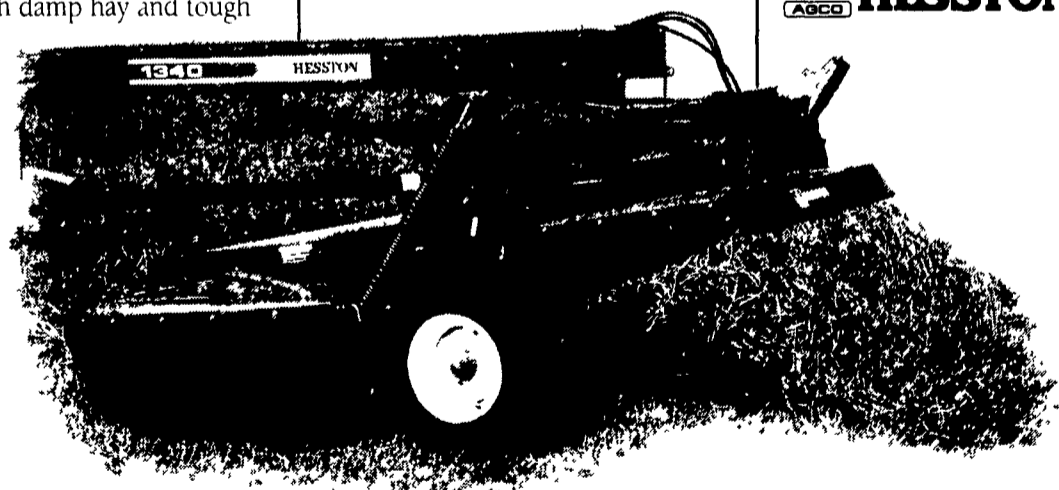
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