

# Corn Tested As Alternative Forage Crop For Cattle

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Four rows of corn in a field less than a mile from the Ohio State University campus has so far withstood rain, snow, wind, insects and wild animals. Two university researchers hope the crop is still standing come spring.

The "standing" corn is being tested as a potential alternative

forage crop to extend the grazing season for cattle through the winter months. If successful, the practice of strip grazing could provide a cheap and convenient method for farmers to keep their cattle healthy. The project is part of a larger collaboration among researchers in Ohio, Iowa, Nebraska and Missouri to

improve the profitability and productivity of the beef industry.

Dave Zartman, Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center project leader to the North Central Regional Committee for Ohio, hopes the corn will replace or augment standard winter grazing feed such as stockpiled fescue grass, which is difficult for cattle to reach through deep snow, and hay, which is more expensive than corn. The corn plus mineral supplement would also provide the energy and nutrient requirements that the cattle need.

Stockpiling feed through winter can also be expensive and inconvenient for the farmer when such factors as labor, hauling feed, storage and removal and equipment are taken into consideration. "Our goal is to make it worthwhile for the farmer to get away from those aggravations by having a crop that can be strip-grazed while stockpiling enough feed to make it through winter," said Zartman. "If we don't find a way to reduce production costs, farmers won't be able to keep up competitively."

Rhonda Gruber, graduate research associate with the Department of Animal Sciences, is studying how well the "standing" corn holds up to winter conditions, insects, wild animals, nutrient degradation and mold content. She said preliminary data have yielded positive results. "We've found very little mold, no insect or wild animal problems and only a few of the stalks have fallen over due to wind." The nutrient analysis had not yet been completed.

The study has so far yielded 70 to 100 bushels of grain per acre, more than the researchers had expected, with data to be compiled through March. "We expect to lose about half of the

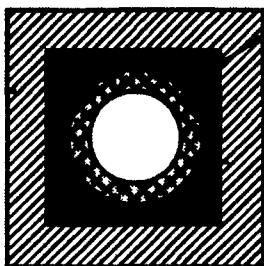
feed availability," said Gruber. "With what's still standing come March, we want to see how feasible it is to have such a practice available. We are then going to conduct livestock trials and study factors like management and consumption patterns."

Gruber said analyzing corn as an alternative forage crop has not been widely researched, which leaves many questions to be answered, such as what corn varieties best withstand winter conditions, how many head of cattle can be fed, and how much money a farmer would actually

save, if any at all.

The researchers, however, do know that strip grazing does work. Farmers in Argentina allow cattle to feed on "standing" corn to recoup the costs lost when harvesting becomes too expensive. Zartman also said that strip grazing keeps cattle healthy because manure is distributed outside rather than in a barn and because the cattle live in the fresh air, cutting down on disease. Strip grazing may also help prevent animals from wasting feed and over eating.

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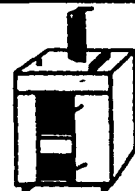
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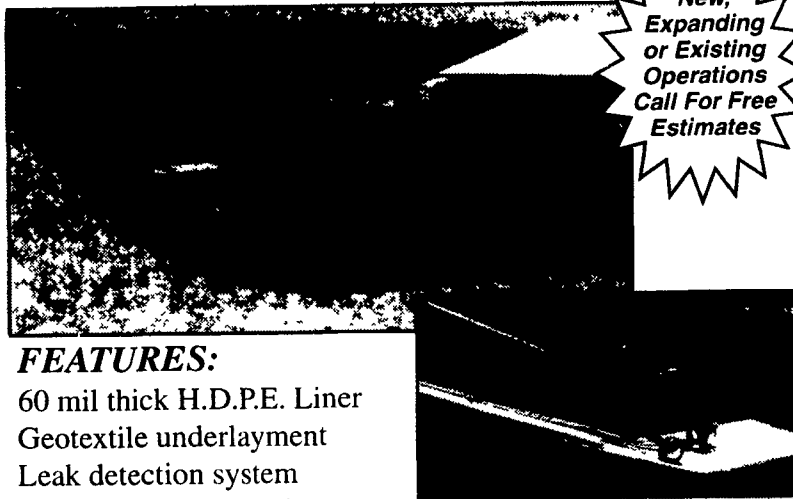
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