

# Silage Quality Results Reported At Lancaster Dairy Day

**DAVE LEFEVER**  
Lancaster Farming Staff

**LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)** — Dairy producers heard the latest information on forage quality at an update exposition provided by the capital region dairy team here last week.

Results were released from a 2001 corn silage quality project, including corn silage sampled from 35 farms in the seven-county capital region.

A major goal of the project is to help farmers better anticipate the right time to harvest their corn silage, according to Glenn Shirk, Lancaster County dairy agent.

Harvesting at optimum plant moisture is key to quality silage, Shirk said.

"Forage quality starts in the field."

The corn silage quality project monitored the effects of harvesting practices and growing conditions on forage quality and feed value.

Dry-down rates and various heights of cut at harvest were also monitored on corn grown at Penn State's Landisville research farm.

Observations and results gathered from the study include:

- Milk line progression and

stalk moisture levels are generally more reliable than percent "firing" of plants to indicate harvest date. In the earlier stages of firing, plants could still be making more top growth.

- When kernels are well developed and milk line begins to regress, whole plant moisture levels drop about 0.65 percentage units per day. If the current moisture level is taken, optimum harvest date can then be calculated.

- Harvesting outside the optimum 61 to 70 percent moisture range can have negative effects on forage quality.

- Sugar levels were too low for optimum fermentation when whole-plant moisture levels dropped too low. Desired minimum plant sugar levels are about four percent for corn silage with 40 percent dry matter. Low moisture levels in the silage also reduced digestibility, lowered energy levels, and reduced dry matter intake. Poorer packing also increased risk of spoilage and mycotoxins.

- In silages that are too wet, fermentation is prolonged and can deplete energy and protein content.

Corn silages cut at 6 inches and 18 inches were compared to evaluate cutting height effects on

dry matter yield, nutrient content, and milk yield.

This study found that increasing the harvest height 12 inches decreased dry matter yield per acre by five percent; decreased nitrate levels; increased in-vitro digestibility; increased percent dNDF, DM, starch, and CP; and increased milk yield per ton of dry matter.

Net economic gains could be boosted by higher cutting and risk of nitrate toxicity may be reduced, the study found. Drought-stunted corn or specialty hybrids may behave differently.

The report concluded that chopping at the right moisture

level is key to good fermentation and silage quality. Growers were advised to monitor corn dry-down frequently after kernels begin to dent by testing four or five stalks for moisture and calculating harvest date.

Optimum alfalfa moisture levels are about five percent less than that of corn silage, when storing in a conventional upright silo, bunker, or trench, according to Penn State data.

Farmers were urged to monitor silage pH to determine proper fermentation. The only tools needed are litmus paper, a cup, and a little water, the report noted.

If corn silage pH is between 3.5 and 4 percent, the silage likely underwent a good fermentation, according to the report.

Farmers also heard presentations on corn and alfalfa diseases and an update on available pesticides.

While silage additives are available for aiding fermentation and preservation of forages in storage, Shirk said they serve mainly as insurance measures. Good growing, harvesting, and storage practices are the most important, he said.

For more information on forage quality or to see study results, call your extension office.

## Tri-County Conewago Creek Association To Meet Feb. 27

**MIDDLETOWN (Dauphin Co.)** — More than 40 participants attended the kick-off meeting to launch a watershed group dedicated to the protection of the Conewago Creek. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 27, at 7 p.m. at the Londonderry Township Building, 783 South Geysers Church Road, Middletown.

"We were extremely pleased at the amount of interest in our first meeting," said Matt Royer, who is heading the initiative to form the group. "Obviously, this is an issue that many local citizens think is important. We had a full house and representation from local government, small business owners, conservation organizations, educational institutions and interested farmers and other landowners. Many individuals provided input as to how they would like to see the group reach goals. This will be an ambitious organization."

The citizens voted on a name for the watershed group — Tri-County Conewago Creek Association — and agreed to organize as a non-profit corporation. They have applied for a Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection "Growing Greener" grant for start-up costs. If awarded, the money will help achieve the group's goal of preserving, protecting and enhancing the water quality of the streams within the watershed.

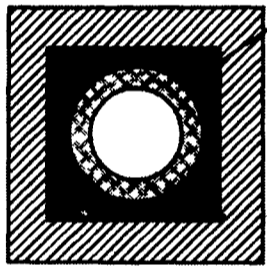
The Conewago encompasses more than 50 square miles in parts of eight different municipalities in Lancaster, Dauphin, and Lebanon counties. Its headwaters are in Mt. Gretna and it discharges into the Susquehanna near the village of Falmouth. Almost the entire headwaters area is forested, and much of it runs through the State Game Lands

surrounding Mt. Gretna. The middle and lower portions of the stream flow through many active farms and rural residential development.

Nearly all of the watershed has been recently assessed by Susquehanna River Basin Commission aquatic biologists on behalf of the commonwealth, and the majority of the watershed is impaired. It is too polluted to sustain the kind of fish and other aquatic life that it could if it was a healthy stream. Increased sediment and nutrients from agricultural runoff have been identified as the major cause of impairment.

Jennifer Hoffman, aquatic biologist from the SRBC, will be speaking at the Feb. 27 meeting about the stream assessment conducted for the Conewago. All are invited to attend.

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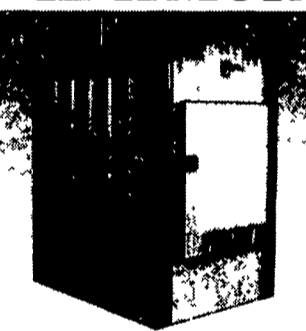
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