



SEVEN COMMON SILAGE MANAGEMENT PITFALLS

Seven common problems or potential problem areas for silage management on dairies are listed below. How many are problems on your dairy and which are causing you the greatest loss? Which are the greatest risks? Often problem areas in silage management become accepted as the normal or tolerated because that is just the way it always has been. Having another *set of eyes* that can help dairymen, nutritionists, farmers and all the others involved in silage production and feeding; periodically help evaluate your dairy and help bring attention to these and other areas can pay big dividends.

- 1. *Not focusing on safety first*** – whether silage is stored in upright silos, drive over piles or bales there are potential dangers from falling from ladders off the top of the piles; from poisonous gases produced during fermentation to being buried in silage falling from the face. Where are your greatest risks?
- 2. *Accepting shrink*** – while advocates of each storage system can justify their preference for bags, uprights, pits or piles every system incurs shrink. Within every system there is a range of losses. Nearly everyone can reduce the shrink on their dairy. Where to focus efforts to do so is the question.
- 3. *Tolerating variation in silage quality*** – whether from varietal differences; differences in dry matter, differences in maturities, degree of processing, duration of ensiling, conditions during storage, feed out practices etc. There will be variations in silage quality; minimizing them pays dividends.
- 4. *Not maximizing harvest quality*** – every crop has an ideal maturity for crop quality in terms of nutrient content. Unfortunately, ideal maturity for nutritive values does not coincide with weather and or maximizing total yields. How can we balance quality vs. quantity vs. risks?
- 5. *Accepting fermentation losses during storage*** – in addition to dry matter losses, silages that ferment poorly lose feed value due to the presence of undesirable fermentation by-products. Haylage harvested too wet or contaminated with ash or manure is likely to be affected by clostridial fermentations and the production of butyric acid and amines. Corn silage that is too wet can result in excessively high levels of all volatile fatty acids, particularly acetic acid.
- 6. *Allowing surface spoilage during storage*** – one of the largest areas for loss of both dry matter and quality occurs at the outer surfaces. Often there are excessive losses which could be prevented by improved packing, covering faster, double covering with plastic, sealing edges and seams better etc. When rain water infiltrates the piles thru damaged plastics, poor seams, inadequate sealing or poor shaping of the piles; losses are extreme and excessive due to added moisture and air.
- 7. *Feeding TMR's containing heating or spoiled feeds*** – not only will feed intakes be depressed but health problems will increase as will the need for purchasing expensive feed additives to minimize the problems which could be avoided by preventing aerobic spoilage at the silo.