

Striking Balance Between Yield & Quality is Key to the Most Profitable Corn Silage

Provided by Monsanto

At first glance, it may seem that corn silage has not changed much in the last 100 years, but a lot has changed when it comes to the art and science of growing the most profitable corn silage due to advances in breeding techniques, improved germplasm and development of weed and insect-control biotech traits.

“The key is striking the perfect balance between yield and quality,” says Jeff Hinen, DEKALB® Area Agronomy Manager in Ohio and the Northeast. “Extremes on either end do not sit well with a dairy herd – dairy cows produce the most milk when they are being fed a consistent diet of high-quality silage. Some high-yielding hybrids can result in lower-quality silage, and the inverse can be true as well.”

The DEKALB silage testing approach is known as the Seed to Feed® testing program. The goal of this testing program is to provide farmers the best information possible to plant, harvest and store high-quality silage. “You have to manage the silage from the time you select your brand until the time the feed goes in the cow’s mouth,” Hinen says. “What a farmer does in between those start and end points can make a big difference in the energy produced per acre and the amount of milk generated by a dairy herd – in short, the amount of profit a dairyman will make.”

The Seed to Feed program involves selecting the best-yielding silage products that will also deliver high-quality feed. These high yielding and high-quality products are identified as SilageProven™ brands. Currently, DEKALB offers 20 SilageProven brands, ranging in relative maturity from 86-118 days. This designation means that SilageProven brands have been researched, evaluated and proven to deliver increased yield potential, high digestibility and maximum milk production.

Barbara Kutzner, PhD, who serves as DEKALB silage lead, emphasizes that all potential DEKALB silage corn products are evaluated by an independent forage laboratory (Dairyland Laboratories, Inc.) using the Milk 2006 prediction model. “Milk 2006 has the advantage that it includes both yield and a multitude of quality parameters to rank hybrids for milk/ton and milk/ac,” she says.

Dr. Kutzner notes that the selection process and parameters for these brands are very stringent. “Whereas DEKALB offers over 160 different corn products, only 20 made the cut as SilageProven products,” she says. “These products meet the objective of dairymen and silage growers who not only want consistent, high-quality silage, but also have an appreciation for high yield.”

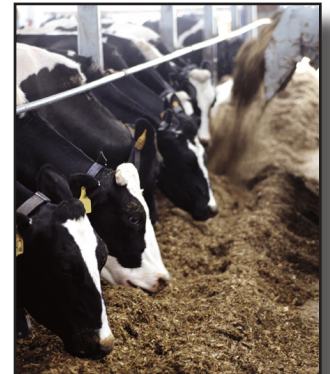
Among some dairymen, there has been a growing preference for corn silage containing brown mid-rib (BMR) germplasm because data has shown it can produce higher milk yields and offers high digestibility. However, the benefits of BMR have to be weighed against its potential economic disadvantages.

With BMR silage, corn tonnage/ac is reduced, so more acres are required. Apart from potential storage issues, this also means BMR silage could be less profitable when fed to lower producing cows or on a total herd basis, especially for smaller herds. Also, because BMR corn has less lignin than non-BMR hybrids, stalk lodging may be a concern.

Based on several years of field research conducted by Monsanto and several land-grant universities, DEKALB brand corn brands yielded an average of 600 more lbs of corn silage/ac, which translated into an average of 537 more lbs of milk/ac than certain competitive products.

Lewiston, MN, farm operator David Heublein manages 1,000 ac of corn and soybeans and runs a cow-calf beef operation. Much of the corn he grows is for silage, not only for his beef cattle, but also for a local dairy. His silage corn brand of choice is DKC 61-69, which he says produces a very good plant, has good disease resistance and which carries the YieldGard VT Triple® trait for insect control.

“We get excellent tonnage – up to 30 tons/ac – with this DEKALB SilageProven product,” Heublein says. “It produces very good feed quality and has lots of grain in it. It’s a high-energy ration with a lot of yellow in the silage.”



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