Factors in Making High Quality Haylage

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In the past several months, there has been a lot of chatter about Wide Swath Haylage. This article includes highlights of a Cornell University project, in addition to a few other points.

Wide Swath Cutting - Much time has been spent proving that mowing hay and laying it in wider swaths pays off. The faster hay is dried to a harvestable level, the higher the nutrient levels. When hay is cut and conditioned it begins to lose not only moisture, but also nutrients. Therefore, the faster the moisture is taken out of the crop, the more nutrients that can be saved and thus more milk in the tank.

Merging Hay vs. Raking Hay - Raking hay for haylage has a tendency to compress at higher moisture levels. Compressed hay will not dry as fast as merged hay. In the Cornell study, merged hay dried faster than narrow swathed hay not merged. Another merging benefit is less stones and debris in the finished windrow. Raking leaves the windrow with higher soil ash content adding to wear on the forage harvester and lowering feed quality. Normal soil ash content from the plant and dust is around 12%. A good rule to follow is for each additional 1% of ash, a loss of 1% of TDN in feed quality can be calculated; this is considerable and should be taken into account. Merged hay, smooth and bunch free, feeds into the forage harvester evenly and may increase its capacity. Raked hay is compressed and does not feed as evenly, slowing down the harvesting process. These are a few benefits to merging hay for forage.

When figuring out if cutting and windrow consolidation processes should be changed, these factors may need to be considered. Wide Swath Cutting and Merging do pay off! Research conducted by Cornell can be seen at www.cce.cornell.edu/rensselaer/agriculture.