



Ag Health News

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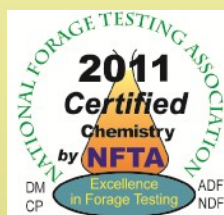


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How can you maximize forage quality?

What can be done to improve quality?

The major things that affect forage quality are *stage of maturity at harvest* and proper *harvesting and storage* of the forage crop. Make sure to continue to evaluate the *stage of maturity* of your forage crops and be ready to harvest as soon as the opportunity arises when the forage crop has reached the optimal stage of maturity. If you harvest your own forage crops, have all of your equipment available and working ahead of harvest time.

Make sure you have employees available and adequately trained to do the harvesting prior to the start of harvesting. If you custom hire harvesting of forage crops, be in contact with your custom harvester about details related to harvesting your forage crops.



The main factor affecting forage quality *during harvesting* is *rainfall*. Watch the weather and avoid rain events as much as possible. However, advancing stage of

New Milk Report Sheets!

If you haven't seen yet, we have updated our milk culture report sheets. We now enter all culture results into our database so we look forward to being able to generate some valuable summaries on mastitis pathogen prevalence within or across herds and over time.

This has also led us to change the reports slightly to include more data on cows and quarters affected. Results are generated as PDF's for faxing and emails. We are continuing to work on automatically downloading culture data into Dairycomp 305. We'll let you know as we progress.

Please let us know if you have any questions. Thank you.

maturity has a greater effect on reducing forage quality than a rainfall event. So don't wait too long to harvest. Consider harvesting alfalfa in the late afternoon if you have control over the *time of day that the forage is harvested*. Research has shown that sugar levels in alfalfa are highest in the afternoon because plants accumulate soluble carbohydrates during the day and use them overnight.

It pays to take time to *store* hay and silage correctly. Staking hay directly in inclement weather has a detrimental effect on hay quality and feed intake. Therefore, it is optimal to cover your hay with a protective covering to reduce dry matter loss associated with storage as well as to help preserve the quality of the hay that was harvested. Silage needs to be packed

adequately to remove as much air as possible to aid with the anaerobic fermentation process that forage goes through after it has been ensiled. Covering bunker silos and pits with a cover that will keep the top of the silage stack away from weather exposure and air will help preserve the quality of the silage.

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There are other things that can be done to enhance forage quality. Choose *varieties of forage* that have been tested to be superior in forage quality compared to its counterparts (primarily look at crude protein and fiber levels and digestibility estimates for grasses and legumes and add starch to the evaluation when looking at corn silage or other grain silages). However, when evaluating varieties of forages for enhanced quality, don't forget to look at yield estimates to make sure you avoid varieties that will substantially reduce yield. Evaluate the quality of your alfalfa stand. If you are starting to see weeds or native varieties of grass appear in substantial amounts, the quality of the alfalfa stand will decline. Pay attention to *soil fertility*, and make sure that the nutrients needed to grow the forage crop are present in the proper concentration in the soil prior to planting, prior to the initiation of a new growing season, and throughout the growing season as necessary.

Pay attention to the details and plan accordingly. Set time aside this spring to evaluate your forage crop program. Look for ways to improve upon what you are currently doing. Ask your nutritionist, agronomist, veterinarian, forage seed providers, and other industry professionals (such as university professionals) for information and guidance about your forage crops. Going into this growing season prepared and with some attention put aside to evaluate your forage program will pay off!

Lynn VanWieringen and Fred Muller

References:

Ball, D.M., M. Collins, G.D. Lacefield, N.P. Martin, D.A. Mertens, K.E. Olson, D.H. Putnam, D.J. Undersander, and M.W. Wolf. 2001. Understanding Forage Quality. American Farm Bureau Federation Publication 1-01, Park Ridge, IL.