

Prairie News

Focus On Quality Forage

Most producers know how important forage quality is to a successful operation, but there are times when you are faced with some tough decisions at harvest time. With this year's first cutting of hay only days away and a lot of us still wrapping up the finishing touches on the spring planting, you may not have had time to think about some of the keys to high quality forage and some of the roadblocks that can stand in the way. Here are a few ideas to think about as you are hooking up the mower.

Error on the early side. When you are thinking about cutting, error on the early side. There are several reasons why this is recommended. The first is mother nature can be mother nature and with that being said, we all can or should remember last year at this time when we had a brief 4-5 days of sun followed by 30 days of on again, off again rain. Some producers took advantage of that brief opportunity, but many got caught in the late spring rain and harvested 1st crop into mid to late June. This resulted in over-ripe, wet, and or rained on haylage that was well below average quality.

Straw is cheaper than soybean meal. That may sound a little funny to some of you, but many of you know exactly what I'm talking about. With today's purchased feed costs at record levels and looking to stay high for an extended period of time, it is absolutely important to have high quality forage. It is much cheaper to add a fiber source to a ration if it calls for it, than to add soybean meal or another high protein or high energy source to the diet. The bottom line is high quality forage means money in your pocket.

Inoculate. Putting a quality inoculant with your forage is highly recommended. Inoculating your forage will increase the speed of the fermentation process which will help reduce spoilage and dry matter loss. Even with little or no visible spoilage, you can still have 3-5% dry matter loss with poor or slow fermentation. Prairie Ag Supply carries Biotol brand inoculant produced by Lallemand Inc. It is one of the most researched and highly rated inoculant brands on the market.

Pack, Pack, Pack. For the producers who make piles, fill bunkers or bags,

packing cannot be emphasized enough. There's nothing worse than filling bunkers and seeing the pack tractor sitting on top of a half filled bunker, idling, and waiting for the next truck to pull in. Keep those tractors packing! There's no such thing as haylage being packed too much. You may need to use two tractors. The more weight the better. For bags, set the brakes on the baggers and tractors if necessary to pack as tightly as the bag will allow. Less air equals better fermentation and more profitable forage.

It's hard to keep quality in mind while getting caught up in the rush to get everything done. Remember, the feed you put up now, is the feed you'll have to work with over whatever time period it takes to use up. For some producers, that can mean months. We strive to give producers rations that will help make them as profitable as possible and producing quality forage is without a doubt one key to success. Good luck and hope you all have a safe and bountiful harvest.

Tom Pfeilsticker, PAS

Prairie Ag Supply LLC

Dates to remember in June...

- ◇ June is Dairy Month!
- ◇ Dunn County Breakfast June 4th
- ◇ Eau Claire Breakfast in the Valley—June 10th
- ◇ Trempealeau on the Farm—June 11th
- ◇ Buffalo County Dairy Breakfast—June 25th



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Heat Stress



As we come into the warmer months of the year, producers should take a little time to prepare for heat stress. Cows can show signs of heat stress with temperatures as low as 70 degrees. Keep in mind that humidity, wind speed, and air temperature also affect the cows' performance on the farm. Heat stress is a very real and costly problem during the summer months. Here are a few things that a producer can do to help minimize the effects heat stress have on cattle:

Sprinkler systems are very beneficial. Keeping these above the feeding rail,

holding pens, and alleyways help cool the cow. Also by getting the cows wet you get evaporative cooling when she leaves that area.

Fans provide air movement that helps keep cattle cool. Fans should be large enough to move a large amount of air in the space provided. If you have a limited amount of fans to use, put them in holding areas and above the stalls where the cows lay.

Keeping an ample supply of clean, fresh water to all cattle is very important. Having multiple water troughs in an area helps eliminate boss cow bullying. Try to have at least 2 inches of trough space

per cow. This will increase drinking habits and keep the cows hydrated. This is especially important for milking cows, but it is also important for dry cows and heifers too!

Keeping cows cool, hydrated, and comfortable on the dairy will go a long way to combat heat stress. Fans, sprinklers, and ample water supply are some of the ways to overcome heat stress.

I hope that these three tips/reminders have sparked your interest in overcoming heat stress.

Alicia Pfeilsticker

Employee Profile—Neal Winger



Neal Winger has been with Prairie Ag Supply since August 2004. Neal has been a great addition to the Prairie Ag team, and is always willing to help out a fellow co-worker.

Neal grew up in Gilman, WI on a 60 cow dairy. After high school he attended the University of Wisconsin, River Falls and graduated with a Bachelors of Science degree in Broad Area Agriculture.

He started his career as a Nutrition Consultant with a co-op in Minnesota and worked there for 5 1/2 years. Neal then joined the family here at Prairie Ag Supply as an Animal Nutrition Consultant. Though he spent many years in Minnesota, he never lost his Packer Pride.

Sports is always on Neal's radar and he knows almost anything about what is going on in the sports world.

When Neal is not working, you can find him playing basketball with his teenage son Brendon, or relaxing with his lovely wife Renee and Chucky, their wiener dog.

Neal is a great asset to Prairie Ag Supply and we are very happy to have him as part of the team.

Manage your Shrink

With feed costs being one of the largest expenses to a dairy, managing shrink is of the utmost importance. Shrink is defined as the amount of feed that is on the farm not consumed by the cattle. Feed shrink is caused by a variety of factors, some of them being: wind, birds, silage bunker loss, and mixing errors.

Is it windy when you are feeding? Mixing and dumping ingredients when it is windy can add up to a huge loss to the producer. When producers dump commodities on a concrete pad, and move it into a shed, and/or mix out in the open, the wind can carry ingredients away. The combined loss can be as much as 8-9%. If you are paying \$380 a ton for soybean meal at 8% loss, you really are paying \$410 a ton. If you feed a lot of small, light weight products, try adding some fat to increase the density or invest in a bin/auger feeding system.

Birds are beautiful to look at, just not in your feed bunks. Birds create a significant impact on feed cost. A starling consumes 50% of their body weight in feed each day. If one starling eats 1.5oz a day (which doesn't sound like much) and you have 10,000 birds eating out of your bunks, you are losing 938lbs of feed each day.

Fecal contamination is also a large problem. It

reduces feed intakes and increases the threat of diseases like Salmonella. With the double whammy of lost feed and decreased intakes, birds can easily cost 8-9 cents per cow each day.

Bird control is generally only needed 2-4 months per year. Controlling where the birds congregate is key. Birds generally feed during the middle of the day. Keeping birds away from the feeding area during that time can limit the amount they can eat.

Lowering the water level in drinking troughs to more than 6 inches from the top of the trough will prevent birds from drinking while perched on the rim and maintaining a water depth of greater the 6 inches will prevent birds from standing in the trough and drinking.

A bunker is a bunker, right? Well-kept bunkers are very important to minimizing feed loss. Harvesting crops at the right moisture and the use of an inoculant decreases silage loss. Putting silage up too wet or too dry hampers the fermentation process and can increase your loses. An over filled bunker increases feed loss because it is harder to get it packed. Keeping packing tractors moving at all times and filling to the proper level is best. Getting the bunker covered as soon as you can

decreases the amount of extra moisture and air, thus reducing your shrink. The biggest area of silage loss is inadequate maintenance of the bunker face. Keeping the face vertical, and sizing the face to the herd are critical to keeping spoilage at a minimum.

Is mixing really considered shrink? It is if you don't scale out feedstuffs accurately or you over-feed ingredients. If you have feedstuffs that are fed at less than 5 pound per head per day, you may want to consider making a prebatch with those ingredients. If you make one big batch of prebatch and feed out of that every 2-3 days, instead of mixing individual ingredients every day, you decrease your chances for shrink.

Ways to overcome mixing errors are to mix in the order that is given, mix to an ingredient weight, and to use a prebatch when possible. The general rule is to keep forage shrink to 10% or less and concentrates less than 5%.

With the prices of feed commodities on the rise, managing your shrink is a great way to save cost. If you have any questions about how to manage your shrink, feel free to talk to a Prairie Ag Supply representative.

Alicia Pfeilsticker



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