

Weather conditions and their affect on forage quality

While traveling through the finger lakes region over the past few weeks, I got a good look at corn, beans, small grains and hay on the many dairy and cash crop farm in the area.

Small grains look great (nothing that one bad thunderstorm couldn't ruin but let's hope that doesn't happen). I also saw some of the nicest new air flow seedings I have seen in a long time. I guess the cool spring and summer has been good for those crops in some places. That said though, the cool wet weather has made it difficult to get perennial forages harvested on time and safely. I also had the misfortune this week of driving by the aftermath of a barn fire where exhausted firemen were still tending to smoldering piles of hay and burned buildings. I am guessing that wet hay could have been the cause of this fire. It brought back vivid and emotional memories of a barn fire on my family farm about 50 years ago and that is not a memory that I care to re-visit!



Likewise, the cool spring and summer has not been good for corn or beans. In a word, Central New York corn and beans are variable. The dry conditions in April resulted in uneven emergence and the cool wet weather that followed just made matters even worse!

That's my sister & me (on the right) sitting on the running board of this 1932 Nash Cabriolet at my family farm sometime in 1957 about the time of the barn fire. By the way, this car is now residing in a museum in Paris France. My mother's \$65 investment in a cheap, but very rare car paid off handsomely when she sold it 3 decades later.

It seems like there are pockets of good corn where good management plus a good microclimate have combined to the benefit of the farmer (a few spots around Waterville, Otisco and Seneca Falls looked particularly good for any year). But, travel just a few more miles and the combination of climate and/or management has taken its toll and both corn and beans seem delayed and more variable than normal.

I have seen what seems to be more herbicide injury than normal, perhaps the result of cold wet soils and stressed plants adding insult to injury. I saw quite a few fields with herbicide injury where leaves and sometimes entire plants were bleached out (like Command injury). These fields have recovered for the most part but they are still quite variable which will make it difficult to schedule harvest.

Uneven stands generally yield less for obvious reasons. The older plants tend to out compete the younger plants for sunlight, moisture and nutrients plus the late emerging plants may be more susceptible to silk clipping by European Corn Borers preventing pollination and reducing kernel set.

This is a year that will also keep nutritionists hopping. Testing new crop corn silage is always a priority but it will be more important and perhaps more difficult due to the variable maturity and quality of our corn crop this season. This variability will stick with us for quite some time, perhaps requiring more frequent forage analysis and "tweaking of rations" to keep cows on target.

I will paraphrase a bit but University of Wisconsin Corn Agronomist Joe Lauer had this to say in 2001 when corn was very uneven in maturity in his state.

"Immature areas within a field will be wetter than the rest of the field and might seep in the bunker, but as long as seepage does not leave the bunker, nothing is lost. To harvest an uneven field, begin chopping when the majority of the plants (>50%) within the field are at the correct moisture for the storage structure. If developmentally uneven plants are randomly scattered within a field, there should be no problem because adequate mixing occurs as plants are chopped and packed into the silo. Problems are more likely if large problem areas exist or switching to fields that differ significantly for moisture result in large layers in the silo that are significantly wetter or drier than the optimum storage moisture for the structure. If an uneven area is located in a field so that each pass of the chopper moves through the area, then adequate mixing will occur and fermentation will not be unduly affected. If however, the area runs with the rows, then the area should be segregated and harvested separately."

By now I am sure you have the picture...even if the weather improves into August and September, the stage is set for some challenging conditions at harvest. This is a year when it will be a good idea to take inventory of all of your fields. Talk to your crop consultant and nutritionist and develop a harvest strategy to optimize mixing of uneven maturities and minimize variability within the silo. Part of that strategy should include frequent forage analysis to get a handle on changes in quality as they happen so you can adjust your rations accordingly.

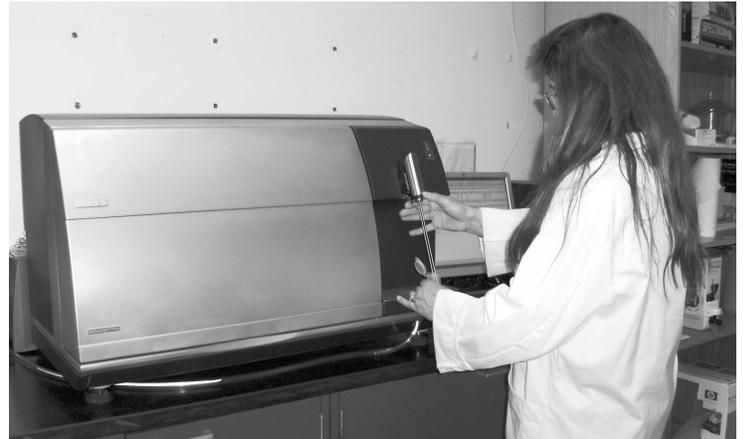
Finger Lakes Wine Laboratory

The Finger Lakes Wine Laboratory is a Dairy One initiative undertaken with guidance from the New York Wine and Grape Foundation, Cornell's Wine Analytical Laboratory in Geneva and Cooperative Extension and unwritten through a New York Farm Viability Grant.

Currently there is no commercial laboratory within New York to serve winery needs. Laboratories in other regions provide analytical services but the logistics of shipping samples and the delay in receiving the results hinder the usefulness to wineries in the region.

Our unique courier service provides transportation of samples to the lab depending on location. Typically results are available within 24 hours after arriving at the lab. The lab provides fast and objective analysis of must to help monitor and optimize the winemaking process. This early evaluation can help decrease costs by avoiding possible delayed or stuck fermentations and by decreasing additives to the wine later in the process.

The equipment necessary for analysis and having trained technicians to use it is an expensive proposition for small or medium sized wineries. Additionally, manpower is always stretched thin during the busy crush season. This service consists of a routine pickup of samples and laboratory analysis to supply timely, accurate information. The goal is to help wine makers make informed decisions prior to fermentation. The end results will be monetary savings plus a more consistent quality wine allowing the wineries to compete with their counter-parts across the United States.



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