

Seed Corn Catalogs prompt thoughts for next growing season

This growing season is barely over but the new catalogs urge us to think about starting the whole process all over again. It gets us thinking "green thoughts" about next spring while this season is still fresh in our mind.

Yield and Quality

Yield and quality should be the primary considerations for silage hybrids. It is important to look at yield and quality over several locations, beginning with trials nearest to your farm. The general consensus is that 15 - 20 sites are best. Data from a single plot may not tell you much due to the potential variation at that single site, ie. environment, soil type, tillage, manure application, soil compaction, weeds and insects, etc. Check with your local extension agents and seed representatives for results from local and state trials.

Avoid comparing apples with oranges. By that I mean that you should compare hybrids with similar maturities (+/- 1% moisture) within a trial since there could be several maturity groups represented in the same trial.

Identify the best hybrids in each maturity group and evaluate their performance over several years and locations. Avoid inconsistent performers.....top of the pack this year but bottom of the pack last year.



Select hybrids with appropriate maturity rating.

Hybrid Maturity

Select hybrids with maturity ratings appropriate for their intended use and for your geographic area. Silage hybrids can be 5 - 10 days later in maturity than adapted grain hybrids. Plant a range of hybrid maturities to spread your work load and ensure greater diversity.



Standability

Standability is a bigger issue with grain hybrids or dual purpose hybrids harvested as grain. However, some "high quality" silage hybrids may have standability issues if harvest is delayed past optimum. Know what you are dealing with and manage to reduce your risk.

Disease resistance or tolerance

Molds and mycotoxins are a potential problem for grain or silage and hybrid resistance should be a consideration. Other management practices including tillage, balanced fertility, pest management, timely planting and harvest, correct harvest and storage management will have a strong influence on plant health and forage quality. Keep in mind that mycotoxins may be present even when there is no visible sign of stalk or ear rot. Likewise, you may have visible mold without any mycotoxins. The only way to know for sure is to test it.

Drought tolerance

Drought is a serious problem in some parts of the northeast and should be factored in during the hybrid selection process, especially if you have experienced serious drought problems in the past.

Management Interactions

Tolerance to cold soils (for early planting), plant population, tillage, and crop rotation are often rated in seed catalogs. Some differences do occur but superior hybrids generally perform well regardless of cropping system. Harvest timing and the likelihood of wet soils (or snow) at harvest may dictate the selection of earlier maturing hybrids.

Herbicide & Insect Resistance

It is hard to find a corn hybrid without the Roundup Ready, YieldGard, Liberty Link or Herculex traits...it has become a standard feature in most product lines. There were 18 corn silage hybrids to choose from in one of the seed corn catalogs I looked at today, 17 out of the 18 were stacked with both Roundup Ready and one or more YieldGard traits. Only 1 out of 17 was “conventional”. The grain hybrids had 2 out of 18 that were “conventional”. I guess that makes the “conventional” varieties rather unconventional or unique doesn't it? None the less, you need to think about what traits you want or need.

Special Traits

There are a number of hybrids with special traits to enhance the nutritional quality of harvested silage. This includes;

- Brown Mid-rib corn – Lower lignin, higher fiber digestibility
- High Oil Corn – Higher digestible energy
- Leafy Hybrids – Higher tonnage & quality
- High starch Hybrids – Higher energy

Be sure to look before you leap! Agronomic performance must be balanced with forage quality so be sure you understand the pro's and cons of any specialty hybrid before planting it:

- Do you need to store this hybrid separately to see a return on investment?
- Will that leafy hybrid provide the yield of digestible nutrients you need?
- What changes do you need to make in your ration with that high oil hybrid?
- Will you see a consistent improvement in feed efficiency?

And of course, we can undo all the potential nutritional advantages if harvest is delayed or storage and feedout is not managed to capture optimum quality. Remember to ask for side by side comparisons from multiple sites over several growing seasons. Look for consistent, repeatable results.

Corn Silage Quality

Seed companies usually characterize their corn silage hybrids based on yield and digestibility. It should be noted that there are several methods for determining digestibility. You can compare the digestibility of hybrids from the same company but company to company comparisons are difficult since each company may use a different technique to measure quality. It is probably a good idea to check the actual digestibility of your corn silage as a routine part of your ration balancing program. That plus your cows performance will help confirm product claims. Go to www.dairyone.com for a description of the techniques we use to measure forage quality.

There are many ways to define corn silage quality. But the bottom line is potential milk per ton or per acre. If storage space is tight, milk per ton is probably the best measure of quality on your farm. If acreage is tight, then perhaps milk per acre is more important.

So before you place that seed corn order you may want to figure out what approach will fit your specific needs best. Adapted hybrids with proven agronomic and nutritional profiles are the foundation but the rest is up to you and how you manage it.



Prepay NOW – \$AVE later

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