

Earless Corn Silage

Situation Statement: Outagamie County is in the center of one of the most cow dense areas in the United States with over 50 cows per square mile. There are 36,500 milk cows in Outagamie County and approximately the same number of dairy heifers. In the last decade custom heifer growers have developed in the dairy industry to support farms that have expanded milk cow numbers and chosen to have their heifers raised on other locations. This system has put heifers in more intensely confined facilities and also increased the feeding of corn silage in heifer rations due to manure management concerns, and improved yield of corn for silage. This has resulted in heifers that are fatter and have increased calving difficulty, which decreases milk production and profitability in first calf heifers.

Response: In collaboration with Mike Bertram, Pat Hoffman, Joe Lauer, Mike Rankin, local crop consultants, and area farmers small replicated plots were planted at Marshfield and Arlington research Stations, strip plots were planted in Fond du Lac and Outagamie Counties and demonstration fields were planted near Bonduel and Waupun. As this is the second year of the study, we planted corn hybrids from Brazil, Mexico, and south Texas. More emphasis was put on agronomical traits with lodging and disease being watched more closely. Yields were monitored and samples were sealed in food saver bags to allow fermentation to complete before analysis. Harvest was conducted from September (Very Early) to November with most in the last part of October or the first part of November. A field day was held at the Outagamie County site with small attendance but very good media coverage in the Wisconsin State Farmer. Other articles were written and published in the Hay and Forage Grower and I spoke at a heifer grower meeting in Sheboygan County. This followed a year of talking at local Forage Council meetings and Heifer Growing meetings in the winter of 2007.

Results: Plot results varied on many sites, but showed reliability in getting starch levels under ten percent compared to 25 percent and up for normal corn silage hybrids adopted to this area. Yields however seem to lag moderately in some plots and compared or lead the checks in other plots. Plots yielded better at Malone and Arlington and poorer in Marshfield and Freedom. Lodging scores indicated that a couple hybrids did not stand well in the plots and one demonstration field went down and needed to be harvested with a special head to get it in the chopper.

Evidence: Currently heifers are being fed earless corn silage at the Marshfield Research station and another trial will be conducted this summer. I have had calls to see where seed could be purchased over the last few months so some farmers are contemplating a field of earless corn silage to be used to feed heifers. I had a call from one farmer who wanted to graze the corn for beef animals in the fall and another farmer from Pennsylvania who wanted to plant some so he could feed to steers in the winter so they could be marketed, as grass fed not grain fed. Croplan has carried the corn from Mexico in their seed catalog but has sold a limited amount on a cash only basis with no return.