



Cornell University
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Northwest New York Dairy, Livestock & Field Crops Team

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Quality Harvest from Start to Finish

As I write this (7/12) we are officially in a moderate drought in primarily all of the NWNY region. First, second and third cuttings of hayfields have been much lighter than usual, pastures have stopped growing, and cornfields are short. There isn't much in the long range forecast for relief from these conditions.

First of all, make sure you do a great job with silage harvest. Take the time to tune up the chopper in regards to particle size and processor settings. You may need to adjust equipment from field to field! Stalk nitrate levels could potentially be high, so chop height should be raised to 8-12 inches. This is a tough decision when yields are low, but keep quality in mind. Timely rainfall would help, but wait 5-7 days prior to chopping if we get significant rain (1"?). The nitrates in the lower stalk will translocate with stimulated new growth. You might be able to chop shorter then.

This is not the year to skimp on inoculant. Research has shown there is a payback of 10:1 with the use of inoculants. Also, make sure your dry matter is where you want it to be; start harvest at 32-35% DM with the higher end of the range for upright silos. Don't look at kernel milkline, take a sample and dry it down. Remember koster testers can give you a reading of 2% points drier than actual dry matter. If you don't have a koster tester, work with your nutritionist or call us.

Prevent as much storage loss as possible. Double-layer plastic, white over black, is ideal as an oxygen barrier. Silo Stop™ is even better in one step. It would be beneficial to cover side walls as well.

This could be a year for high risk of silo gases since nitrates may be high. I have heard reports of gas formation with haylages in upright silos. These are primarily formed from nitrates in the plants. Gas produced is primarily nitrogen dioxide. Make sure upright silos are properly aerated for 15-30 minutes before entering. These gases can form in bunk silos too, so use care when uncovering. If there are signs of throat or lung irritation, leave the area immediately.

After harvest is in, take an inventory. Fact sheets to assist with estimating inventory and herd forage needs are listed under **Fall Feeding Decision Tools** are on our website. Plan out how much you have and how much you need. Start now to find feed if you anticipate running out. Forages may be in short supply in parts of the NWNY region. Look for nearby standing corn, corn silage or hay. Work with your nutritionist to find alternative feedstuffs.

From a haycrop perspective, maybe give those poorer fields a shot of nitrogen. This will only be helpful if we get some rain! Try 50 lbs actual N. Hit the older fields harder and try to save the younger fields for next year. Make sure you have adequate potassium on your alfalfa fields to prepare them for overwintering. If you fall-kill sod, maybe keep those fields for an early harvest in the spring and hit with 100 lbs actual N at green-up. Another option for spring harvest as well as cover crop benefits is winter grains. Recent research

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has shown rye, triticale, and wheat can provide biomass of 2 to 4 tons DM/ac when harvested early to mid-May, even when planted after corn silage harvest. Fact sheets on this are available on our website. There is time for spring or forage oats. They should be planted in early to mid-August for 60-75 days growth. They could be stored as haylage, baleage, or possibly dry hay.

Get forage analyses on your silages. Cull least profitable cows now. Check your number of youngstock, too. Now is the time to sell so you aren't feeding them all winter.

All the factsheets and tools referenced in this article are listed under Announcements at <http://nwnyteam.cce.cornell.edu/>.