



RUMINANT TECHNICAL NOTE – OCTOBER 2011

MAIZE HARVEST – READY TO GO?

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Hold your nerve!

With maize close to harvest it is important to see that the potential value of the crop is not compromised. Despite often being anxious for maize to be present in the diet, it is most undesirable to harvest immature maize. Harvesting early leads to not only reduced starch content, but also a low dry matter content and increased acidity. All these factors can jeopardize the diet in which the maize is fed.

Accurate crop DM assessment

A dry matter of 32 – 35% is desirable at harvest. To achieve this generally requires a combination of cob maturity and a degree of wilting / dying off of the leaf. However, there is considerable varietal and geographical difference in how crops reach the desired dry matter, influenced markedly by the weather on the run up to harvest. What is certain is that there will generally be considerable variation over the field, with that nearest the gate often being a poor representation of the field. Be critical of the crop maturity in several areas of the field. The Milk line test provides a good guide to cob maturity. Select a kernel from the middle of the cob, and use your finger nail to see how far from the outside surface the firm starch gives way to milk. The line should be approaching half way down the kernel. If in doubt make up a representative sample from chopped whole plants and send to a laboratory, or use an oven / microwave at home if you are confident.

Review and prepare

Before harvest starts see that the clamp is sound, additive is available if required, and clear / black sheets are present. Above all be clear who is responsible for ensiling the maize. If there were concerns over spoilage / deterioration last year, discuss what is required to stop the problem. The person on the clamp is key to making the maize a real asset and getting most from it. They must have the right equipment, adequate time and enough relief to get the job right.

Keep a close eye

Check grains (kernels) are adequately damaged. The drier the crop, the more damage is required, so that kernel particles are small or crushed.

Check the chop length is as required. Avoid short chopping (< 15mm) if maize is a large proportion of the forage, and you feed a higher amount of concentrates. If you have had clamp spoilage in the past, be wary about chopping longer, unless you are confident that consolidation in the clamp is good.



Keep a close eye on chop length and corn cracking

Check additive is being applied as required. Continually re check that grain damage and chop length are correct. If long pieces of leaf start coming in, it is time to re-sharpen / set the blades.

Do not let the speed maize comes in, upset the necessary consolidation.

Finish the job properly

When finished there should be no need for prolonged rolling. A clear sheet should be used to cover the clamp immediately, getting as good a seal at the shoulders as possible. Fully sheet and weight down as soon as possible – not tomorrow! Never start feeding the clamp before it has been fully sealed up, and leave as long as possible before starting. A tall order I accept, but starch availability will be reduced for at least a month.

The target must be, to be able to feed all the maize in the clamp. There should be no visible waste. Think back to what you lost last year and plan to prevent it. To sort good from bad when feeding is a difficult job, and the stock will always be a better judge than you.