



ADVANCED AG SYSTEMS'

Crop Soil News

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"It is the crops
that feed the
cows that make
the milk
which creates
the money."

Advanced Ag Systems
Research, Education, Consulting

Farming Lottery: Picking Corn Varieties

It is that time of year again where we peruse corn seed catalogs, attempting to pick out the best varieties for your farm. They all look perfect; but are they.

As we are growing dairy forage, quality not just yield, needs to be considered. The fiber portion makes up half of the dry matter so a slight change in digestibility can have a significant impact on potential milk production. The other factor to consider is the percentage of the total yield that is starch. You need to be cautious with the starch number because a very hard starch will look good on paper but not milk as well even with processing and long fermentation times. A softer kernel will process easier and give more energy to the cow and not to the birds picking at the manure. With milk price down, farmers are grumbling about high seed cost, but in the big picture it usually is a small part of the whole corn silage yield component.

If you want the most out of the seed, you would be best served going over your corn planter to optimize seed placement. Finger type planters need to be calibrated each year for large acreage and at least every other year for small acreage, to determine that everything is working correctly. Vacuum planter meter units also need to be taken off, stored in a dry spot and sent out for calibration. Utilizing an in-furrow seed firmer assures more accurate placement of the seeds. You invest a tremendous amount of money growing a key energy crop for your animals, don't let the planter issues rob you of your profit.

If you want to really save money, get a soil test as I mentioned in my [October](#) newsletter. What little you could save by skimming on seed cost is thrown away many times over in "insurance" fertilizer.



Farmers will spend hours going over seed catalogs for their corn crop. That much time also needs to be spent going over the corn planter so ALL of the expensive seed you purchased will give you a return.

For choosing the best varieties, there are a number of Universities that run unbiased tests of multiple seed corn companies products in several sites in their states. Cornell, through the efforts of multiple people, has recently re-instated variety trials both in New York and in conjunction with Vermont. Links to the web sites of where the trial results are published are

listed below. If your state/country is not listed, a quick web search will tell you the closest trial to help with your decision.

New York is published at the [ProDairy site](#).

Vermont has been looking closely at short season corn silage for double cropping and it is available [here](#).

Pennsylvania's are at this [location](#)

Minnesota data is available for [2017](#)

Wisconsin corn silage for 2017 is posted at [this site](#)

Michigan's would be [here](#) but the data is still being compiled.

An increasing number of farms have been moving toward shorter season varieties for their location. There are three reasons for this. First, more farms are taking advantage of the phenomenally high forage quality and profitable yields from planting winter forage earlier. The soil benefits, nutrient retention benefits, increasing yields and earlier spring harvest all accrue from earlier planting. This means the corn has to come off slightly earlier. Economic analysis shows this is a very profitable move. Second, as the July newsletter stated, "For the climate change crowd, summertime maximum temperatures have been declining in from Minnesota to Maine for the past 80 years." Thus the heat units we get are shifting, and with the solar minimum we have moved into, will continue to drop. What I have noticed is that spring and especially fall have been warmer than normal. This later change is beneficial to cool season crops like winter forage, but late season warmth is normally too cool to benefit warm season crops such as corn or sorghum. Finally, in response to demand from those growing winter forage; corn seed companies are putting more effort into producing higher yield and higher quality shorter season corn silage varieties. This is showing in the variety trials and in farmer reports.



As a check in our sorghum variety trial this year we planted an 82 day softer kernel silage variety that cranked out 30 tons of 35% dry matter silage/acre

Sincerely,

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Hand
to Better
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