

Late Spring: Forage considerations beyond corn

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Recent weather windows have allowed some progress around the state, however, current field conditions in many areas leave numerous questions and few good answers. With the need to address forage inventories for the coming winter, it may be helpful to think about what can be done to minimize the negative impacts of what mother nature has presented to us. Key decisions in the near future could make a difference between making the best of a bad situation and exacerbating the problems.

To start, the PRO-DAIRY website has resources with related information:

- [Stressed? What to do about it?](#)
- [Forage Management: Salvaging a Late Spring](#)

Quality versus Quantity

Simply having enough feed may be an issue when acres go unplanted. However, often in wet years having enough *quality* feed presents a bigger problem than having enough *quantity*. While numerous alternative forages have the potential to make lactating quality feed, they are more often considered a good option for non-lactating animals, a group that you may already have adequate supplies for after this year's challenges with first cutting. This means that any opportunity to manage our corn and hay crops to optimize quality for lactating animals should receive extra emphasis.

Hay Crop Harvest

The phrase "park the corn planter and cut hay" should be updated to say "park the corn planter and cut quality hay". Addressing unplanted corn acres is certainly important; however, at this point if you have first cutting that still has a higher nutritional value, capturing that is a priority.

- Store forages by quality
 - Consider storage options for over mature 1st cutting that will not compromise proper storage of higher quality feed later in the season.
- Apply nitrogen on grasses after first cutting
- Use harvest techniques to minimize time from mowing to ensiling
 - Fit harvest into tighter weather windows
 - Capture higher quality
 - Help optimize the fermentation process
- Maintain three to four inch cutting height:
 - For stand health (particularly with grass)
 - To minimize ash in forage
 - To aid in drying
- Talk with your nutritionist about length of cut and fiber digestibility. [See recent research from Miner Institute on this topic.](#)

Corn Silage

Refer to the accompany article [PD-2019-06-01. Late planted corn for silage and GDD accumulation.](#) for information on average [growing degree day](#) (GDD) accumulation and corn relative maturity.

Summer Annual Forage Options

Over the years we have become familiar with many summer annual options for forage. They all have strengths and weaknesses and it is important to think about how they will fit into your feeding programs.

Most of these crops feed differently compared to corn silage and haylage, so it is important to treat them accordingly.

- What groups of animals do they work best for?
- How many tons of a given crop do you need to produce to provide adequate inventories for the targeted group of animals?
- How will you segregate these forages in storage to allow for feeding to targeted groups of animals?

Keep in mind that due to soil conditions, annual forages often introduce the risk of picking up excess ground debris during harvest, leading to the potential for higher ash content in forages.

Seed supplies

With the widespread impact of spring weather delays, the supply of shorter season corn and alternative summer annual forages is already tight. Working with your seed supplier to identify alternative forages to make up for any potential forage shortfalls will be important.

Make sure it's BMR

There are non-BMR versions of Sorghum, Sorghum x Sudangrass, Millet and Sudangrass. With potential seed supply issues with these products, make sure you know what you are getting. While non-BMR varieties can be used,

they will not provide the same feed quality as their BMR counterparts.

Alternative Forages

- Long season corn
- BMR Sorghum
- BMR Sorghum x Sudangrass
- BMR Sudangrass
- Pearl Millet
- Teff
- Buckwheat
- Oats (planted Late Summer)
- Soybeans

The CCE North Country Regional Ag team has a summary of [common options](#) at their website. One option not listed in these resources is soybeans for forage. While this crop certainly presents some harvest and management challenges that need to be recognized when making a decision it has been used with some success. [Soybeans for forage](#) may be a consideration given potential seed availability and planting windows.

Purchasing Forage

Now may be a good time to talk with neighbors. With instability in grain markets and late planting presenting questions of whether some corn will mature for grain, there may be opportunities to boost forage inventories. Capturing a later cutting of high quality hay through collaboration with a neighboring livestock farm may be another option.