

THE MANAGER

FORAGE MANAGEMENT

By Bill Cox

When to expect early-maturing corn silage hybrids to be ready for harvest

Early Maturing Corn Silage Hybrids

The 2011 growing season was a challenging one for many corn silage producers in NY, so supply inventory is lower than in previous years. Consequently, some silage producers are contemplating planting early maturing hybrids in case supply inventory is depleted by late summer in 2012. Planting early-maturing hybrids (15 days earlier than typical) in late April or early May should result in a late August to early September harvest if the growing season of 2012 has normal temperatures.

In New York, 75-85 day hybrids are typically ready for silage harvest (~68% moisture for bunker silos) about 1850 GDD after planting, 85-90 day hybrids require about 1950 GDD after planting, 95-100 day hybrids require about 2050 GDD, and 105-110 day hybrids require about 2150 GDD. The average number of growing degree days at the Aurora Research Farm (Cayuga County) from May 1 until September 1 is about 2130 GDD, at Canton

(St. Lawrence County) about 1850 GDD, and in Warsaw, NY (Wyoming County) about 1750 GDD. Consequently, an 85-90 day hybrid planted on May 1 at Aurora would be ready for harvest about August 20-25 in most years. Likewise, at Canton, an 80-85 day hybrid planted on May 1 would be ready for harvest in late August or early September in a typical growing season. At the Warsaw site, a 75-80 day hybrid planted on May 1 would be ready for harvest by September 7 or so, in a typical growing season.

Keep in mind that exceptionally dry August or early September conditions can accelerate harvest by a week or 125 to 150 GDD before it is typically ready. At the Aurora site, we have harvested corn silage hybrids in the full dent stage (typically 70%) at 65% moisture in dry years (1999, 2002, 2005, and 2011). In contrast, heavy precipitation events in late August or early September (more than 2 inches of precipitation) can increase whole plant moisture by 2 to 3 percentage units for the first couple of days after the event. We have harvested corn silage at the ½ milk line stage (typically 65%) at 68-70% near Dansville, NY (2005 and 2006) after significant precipitation events. If you need to replace supply inventory by September 1 of 2012, plant a hybrid that is about 15 days earlier than normal and then carefully watch the hybrid dry-down and monitor predicted weather conditions to insure timely harvest. □



Corn silage harvest in Wyoming County, NY.

FYI

■ Bill Cox is a Soil and Crop Sciences Professor. Reach him at 607.255.1758. Email: wjc3@cornell.edu