

Forage Management

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Corn silage harvest: An exercise in patience (2023)

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As we look across NYS and the Northeast, the 2023 growing season has thrown just about every weather scenario at us, making it hard to generalize any conditions across the state or region. However, as reports come in regarding the timing of tasseling, one general trend seems to be that the timing of tasseling is lagging behind 2022 by a week or more, despite similar planting dates. This has prompted the recycling of this title from an [article](#) shared during another challenging growing season. Due to the uncertainties of this season, we offer some follow-up ideas to build on the [Corn silage harvest toolkit: 2023 edition](#) shared last month.

As we know, [tasseling date is one marker for tracking progress towards silage harvest](#) and a later tasseling date indicates a later harvest, regardless of planting date. The importance of proper harvest timing for corn silage has become an annual message in the industry and for good reason. In a year such as this, where our conventional wisdoms about harvesting timing may be deceived, it becomes important to be extra attentive in tracking stage of the crop. The penalties to yield and quality can be significant when harvesting too early but we do not want to be left unprepared by the perception that harvest timing may be delayed.

HARVEST CHECKLIST

As August progresses look through the corn silage harvest checklist and be ready when the crop is ready.

- ✓ Chopper is ready
 - ✓ Knives and kernel processor are in good condition
- ✓ [Storage](#) area is prepped
- ✓ [Available packing weight is identified to match silage delivery rate](#)
- ✓ A team captain is identified to oversee harvest logistics
 - ✓ Monitor delivery rate and packing capacity
 - ✓ Monitor kernel processing
 - ✓ Monitor crop dry matter
 - ✓ Has the authority to make audibles in harvest plan if above criteria are not being met

MONITOR CORN PROGRESS

Tracking [growing degree days from tasseling](#) remains a helpful tool to estimate harvest timing but should not be used for the final decision.

As the crop nears harvest maturity, [whole plant dry matters](#) and kernel milkline work well in tandem to make the final decision but it is not advisable to use kernel milkline alone.



[Recent work](#) shows how plant maturity can differ from kernel maturity depending on the weather patterns and crop health, a factor that could be intensified this season. Scenarios can occur when the plant is drier while the kernels remain immature, or the plant remains wet while the kernels dry down rapidly, leading to the increasing importance of looking at both factors when making harvest decisions.

While we continue to target a whole plant dry matter of 35 percent, kernel development can inform that range. In a scenario where kernel development is progressing rapidly, harvest may be warranted even if the whole plant dry matter is slightly less than 35 percent. In contrast, if kernel development is progressing slowly but the plants are healthy, it can warrant waiting for a whole plant dry matter greater than 35 percent to optimize the kernels contribution to overall yield and quality.