Silage Spoilage:
Top of the Silo Struggles

We pack it, we cover it, we patiently wait. We open the bunker silo and still find spoilage. That top layer got away from us again. What does it mean for feeding out and how can we do better next time?

Effects of Spoilage

As we know, quality takes a big hit once spoilage moves in especially in terms of nutrients and mold contamination. Nutrients are highly degraded in that spoiled top layer which damages the overall nutritional value of the silage. This means higher feed costs at the end of the day when expensive supplements need to be brought in to balance out the diet. The microbes that flourished causing the spoilage are eating those nutrients to help themselves grow leading to the visible areas of mold and yeast.

Spoiled silage is also not accepted well by most cattle. Feed intakes may be reduced escalating the issues of inadequate nutrition. Poor intakes will ultimately lead to decreased milk production in dairy cattle, and reduced growth rate and efficiency in growing cattle. Increased feed costs and suboptimal production will lead to financial losses. This is compounded by the increase in labor costs to either remove spoilage before it is fed out or the increased time it may take to remove rejected feed from feedbunks.

Mitigation Strategies

Preventing spoilage comes back down to the basics, packing and covering. After spending countless hours packing the bunker, another minute longer seems impossible. But the top of that pile needs to be packed just as tightly as the rest of it. We need anaerobic conditions for proper ensiling, oxygen is our enemy here. So when you think you've made your final pass with the tractor, give it a few more. Then cover immediately with thick black/white plastic and weigh it down with tires or another heavy material. This will minimize the amount of oxygen reaching the feed and lessen the amount of spoilage as well.

Inoculants

Inoculants are a great tool to have in your forage management arsenal, but they do not make up for bad management practices. While inoculants help kickstart the fermentation process, they cannot make up for poorly packed and/or covered piles. When used in conjunction with proper silage management practices, inoculants help accelerate the fermentation process and prevent the growth of mold and yeast.

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