

UK Corn Silage Variety Traits Can Aid In 2011 Planting Decisions

LEXINGTON, KY.

The results of the 2010 University of Kentucky Corn Silage Variety Trials are out. Farmers can use the report's unbiased data on yield and quality to help plan for their 2011 corn silage crops.

"Farmers are looking for data to predict next year's performances, and the best way to do this is to look at a variety's yield data over several years that is grown in several different locations," said Chad Lee, grain crops extension specialist in the UK College of Agriculture.

The 2010 corn silage trial was a collaborative effort by a dozen UK agriculture and natural resources extension agents, Lee, UK extension soil management specialist Greg Schwab and the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences in the UK College of Agriculture. It took place under different growing conditions, soil types and management on cooperating farms in Mason, Adair and Boyle Counties.

Nick Roy, agriculture and natural resources extension agent in Adair County, said only about 7 percent of the corn grown in the United States is harvested for silage, so there has not been a lot of interest by companies in developing silage-only hybrids. A variety trial such as UK's allows farmers to compare hybrids.

Ronnie Lowe, cooperating farmer from Mason County, said he was surprised when he saw firsthand the differences in growth and height of the hybrids in the silage trial. Lowe assisted agents during the harvest phase of the trial. He said he easily could tell the difference in weight between the varieties while collecting stalks for sampling.

Jonathon Gaskins, a dairy farmer in Adair County, participated in the 2010 trials.

"I use the data collected to select corn silage hybrids with high yields and high digestibility," he said. "High digestibility equals more milk produced."

Lee recommended that producers consider both tonnage-yield and calculated milk yields when selecting hybrids.

"If possible, compare data from these tests to data from other tests," he said. "Since there is no way to know what kind of growing season we will have—whether it will be wet, hot or dry—try to find as many hybrid performance charts from as many environments as possible. Hybrids that perform well at multiple environments have the best chance of performing well next year."

Every year's trial yields some unexpected information, according to Roy.

"For example, this year across Kentucky we had fairly heavy disease pressure on the corn crop, not only silage but also the grain varieties," he said. "So this year we were able to collect some data for gray leaf spot disease as well as corn rust. It's little tidbits of information like that that we're able to pull out of these trials that can also be valuable to the farmers."

Dan Grigson, agriculture and natural resources extension agent in Lincoln County, has been involved with the variety trials since their inception in 1998.

"Dairy and beef producers in Kentucky have come to rely on our work to make their decisions on what varieties to plant," he said. "The performance trial is hard work, but we all feel it is worth the effort, because we are helping producers make decisions that can really affect their livestock production profitability."

The UK Corn Silage Variety Trial is open to any company that wishes to submit a hybrid to the trial. Companies interested in submitting varieties into the 2011 trial should contact Grigson at 606-365-2459 or Roy at 270-384-2317.

Results from the 2010 UK Corn Silage Trial are available online at <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/GrainCrops/varietytesting.htm>. △



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