



# AGRONOMIC CROP SCIENCE REPORT

Research

Extension

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## ALTERNATIVES TO HAY: CROPS WHICH CAN BE USED FOR SILAGE

by Les Vough 1/

Forage feeding on many farms is undergoing change. There appears to be a trend away from hay, particularly baled hay, as the primary forage to some form of silage. Reasons for these changes include:

1. Shortages, as well as increased costs, of baling wire and twine.
2. An attempt to reduce harvest and storage losses. More dry matter is conserved because field losses are 10 to 20 percent less than with field cured material.
3. A desire to improve quality, increase yields, and reduce feed costs. Forage quality is usually enhanced because ensiling helps avoid weather damage associated with field curing in many areas.
4. To reduce labor in the handling of forages. Silage is better adapted to mechanization in harvesting, storing, and feeding.

Most crops grown for livestock feed can be stored and preserved as silage. In many areas corn is the most popular silage crop because of its high yield and excellent feed value. Other crops frequently ensiled include alfalfa and other legume-grass crops, sorghums, sudangrass, and small grains, particularly oats. The most common practice in silage making is to ensile the whole plant. This can result in high quality forage suitable for feeding dairy or beef cows, sheep, and cattle being finished for beef.

There are some disadvantages that should be considered before the decision is made to switch to silage, among which are:

1. Storing as silage requires handling two to four times more weight than of field dried material.
2. Storage structures are more costly than for dry forages.
3. Additional harvesting and feeding equipment may be needed.
4. Silage has no ready off-farm market. When silage is to be sold, a price fair to both buyer and seller is difficult to establish.

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