

Correctly Collect Silage and Other Forage Samples



By Donna M. Amaral-Phillips

Properly sampling all forages being fed and using these results to balance rations for not only the milking herd, but also dry cows and heifers, is the cornerstone of all well-managed feeding systems. Remember that forage samples should be taken and analyzed throughout the feeding year, not just in the fall.

For Silage:

- If a TMR mixer is used to feed cows, silage should be collected across the face of the silo, loaded into the mixer without other ingredients, mixed, and unloaded onto a solid surface away from the face of the silo. With the palm of your hand facing up, collect multiple samples (at least 10) from various locations of the newly-made pile in a clean 5-gallon bucket.
- If a TMR mixer is not used or silage is not unloaded from the silo into a pile, silage samples should be collected evenly spaced over the time silage is unloaded from the upright silo or bag with at least 10 to 20 samples collected with your palm facing upwards.
- Mix the forage in the bucket with your hand and dump it out on a clean piece of plastic. Spread the silage out into a circle, divide the circle into quarters, and place one quarter in a plastic quart-sized bag. If the sample is too large, repeat the quartering process after mixing the previously quartered sample by bringing one side of the plastic toward the opposite side.
- Freeze the forage sample if it will not be shipped for a couple of days. Make sure the sample will not be in transit over the weekend to the forage lab. Samples should be kept cool before shipping, i.e. not placed on the dashboard or in hot truck cab.

For Hay or Baleage:

- Using a forage/hay probe, collect samples from 15 to 20 bales of each lot of hay/baleage. The probe should be inserted 12 to 18 inches into the bale. A lot of hay is defined as that from a field of a similar type of forage and harvested at the same time.
- Add the material to a bucket, mix and sample as outlined previously for silages.

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