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Forage Producers Tech Guide:

A Comparison of Hybrid BMR Forage Sorghum and Corn for Silage Production

Historically cattlemen have found that silage produced from forage sorghum was less digestible, contained less energy, and would not produce animal gains equal to that of silage produced with corn. With the development of the BMR trait in forage sorghums, the superiority of corn silage over forage sorghum silage may no longer be true. Following is digestibility data collected from a Sharp Brothers Seed Company customer.

Jerry Doornbos, Scott City, KS. Fall 2001 Fresh Chop Forage (Before Ensiling)

	% protein	%IVTD*
Pioneer 3173 corn	8.80	75.91
SBSC Canex BMR 208	8.01	75.33
Monsanto/Dekalb FS25E	4.80	63.71

*% IVTD is a digestibility rating assigned to feed product samples based upon laboratory or "in vitro" analysis using rumen fluid. IVTD analysis is considered to be the most accurate means of measuring digestibility in a laboratory setting.

The protein and digestibility of Canex BMR 208 was virtually equivalent to that of the corn silage and was noticeably better than that of the standard genetics FS25E forage sorghum. This situation is quite common. Numerous cattlemen are reporting that BMR forage sorghums are producing silage with energy levels and digestibility that were unattainable with standard genetics forage sorghum silage. As a result of this improvement, both dairyman and beef cattle producers are converting their forage acres that are destined for the silo from corn to the BMR forage sorghums.

The advantages of BMR forage sorghum over corn for silage production are many. Seeding cost is much lower. BMR forage sorghums may be seeded for as little as $3.50 per acre as compared to corn with seeding costs of $25 per acre or more. Insect problems are less frequent and less costly to treat. Forage sorghums, including those with BMR genetics, are more capable of maintaining plant health and yield potential through periods of drought than is corn. Having withstood a period of drought, sorghum can recover with vigorous growth much more effectively than can corn. Consequently the timing of rainfall or application of irrigation water is much less critical with sorghum than with corn. Although the tonnage produced per unit of water may be similar for corn and forage sorghum on a theoretical basis, producers find that on a practical basis sorghum's ability to "wait for water" give it greater tonnage potential in many production settings. These factors combine to make BMR forage sorghum silage less risky and less costly to produce than corn silage. As an added benefit, BMR forage sorghums will frequently have a feeding value similar to that of corn on a ton per ton basis.