

Reduce spoilage through careful forage storage

Attentive planning can limit losses for livestock

BY TOM LAWRENCE
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REGIONAL—Proper forage storage is crucial to reducing losses and spoilage.

Forage, defined as plant material eaten by grazing livestock, usually is made up of plant leaves and stems. Some is consumed directly by cattle when they are in a pasture, including grasses and legumes. Other forms include hay that is cut, harvested and cured by farmers and then fed to livestock.

Another form is silage, such as corn

and other crops, which is cut and then chopped while wet, which allows it to ferment for safe storage. It's like canning food for later usage.

Iowa State University Extension dairy specialist Fred Hall, who is based in Orange City, said corn silage is the most commonly used forage in N'West Iowa.

"The most widely used storage system is a drive-over pile," Hall said.

He noted Sioux County led all Iowa counties in total corn silage production in 2021 with 777,000 tons,



Fred Hall

according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Brian Dougherty, a field agricultural engineer with ISU Extension based in Dubuque, discussed factors to consider when evaluating forage storage alternatives during a Feb. 15 webinar designed for producers, dairy consultants and industry representatives.

Dougherty talked about general facility siting and design and discussed tools and tips for selecting



Dougherty

the best fit for a dairy operation. His dairy-related Extension work focuses on facilities, ventilation, manure management, composting and the effects of cropping systems on soil health and water quality.

"Producers need to evaluate capital costs and ongoing cost for labor, plastic, etc., to decide which forage storage option is best for them," he said. "Site selection is critical to prevent wasted time filling and emptying bunkers/piles/bags. Think about ease of access and distance to other feeds. Lack of planning up-front can lead to many years of problems and lost labor productivity."

Dougherty said one of the biggest mistakes farmers make is not achiev-

ing sufficient packing density for silage. This usually happens by filling too fast and/or not having enough weight on packing tractors.

Not covering bunkers and piles with plastic right after filling has been a problem, he said, but almost everyone covers them now. Storing hay outside on the ground with no cover is almost always a poor decision, he said.

It's crucial to properly store forage, Hall said.

"Without proper packing, spoilage can exceed 30 percent of the ensiled dry matter," he said. "With proper packing and pile cover, dry

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Egg prices

have us SCRAMBLING

BY TOM LAWRENCE
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REGIONAL—What came first, the chicken or the skyrocketing price of eggs?

That's not quite how the old saying goes, but high egg prices are one of the first things people think about when talking about grocery shopping.

Maro Ibarburu, a business analyst at the Egg Industry Center at Iowa State University in Ames, said the return of the avian flu, which has once again killed millions of chickens, is the primary reason — but not the sole one — for spiraling egg prices in stores.

"At this time, there are several forces affecting the retail egg price. These

are: an unfortunate reduction in the egg supply, seasonally high demand periods, and high inflation that has risen the cost of producing eggs," Ibarburu said. "The farmer prices have dropped to less than half of what they were in late December. Our data indicates that where farmer prices go, eventually so do consumer prices, but it is impossible to know when."

He said the demand for workers, which is felt across the economy, also impacts egg prices.

"The rural labor shortage impacts the cost of farm labor. This results in an

increased cost of egg production," Ibarburu said.

He said regional numbers are available to compare retail egg prices.

The national average retail price in 2021 was \$1.67 for a dozen eggs while the average in 2022 was \$2.86. The Midwest average retail price in 2021 was \$1.60 and in 2022 was \$2.71.

The rising price of a carton of eggs had people scrambling for the best deal and caused some consumers to crack bitter jokes about paying more for a breakfast meal. But it did not greatly impact egg sales, he said.

"Regarding egg sales, there are two separate egg markets to consider, the shell egg market and the egg products

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Consumers looking for best deals due to dramatic rise in cost

Rural areas in need of more veterinarians

They wear lot of hats in assisting animals

BY TOM LAWRENCE
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REGIONAL—You have a choice: You can work alone, accepting all the opportunities — and pressures — that come with it. The entire financial, physical and emotional burden will be yours to bear.

Or you can work with a group of professionals, accepting your share of the load but not carrying all of it.

There are other choices to be made: Do you want to work outside on a regular basis, facing the diverse and challenging climate that Iowa offers while dealing with large, at times dangerous animals?

Or would you rather work out of an office, usually handling small, well-behaved creatures?

Those decisions help explain why there is a growing shortage of large-animal veterinarians, especially those who work alone, according to Iowa Veterinary Medical Association executive director Dr. Randy Wheeler.

"You're seeing this across the states," Wheeler said. "That there's a shortage of veterinarians and veterinary technicians, veterinary assistants."

As of 2022, there were 2,987 veterinarians and 598 veterinary technicians in Iowa. When Wheeler, 70, began his career in

the 1970s, it was in a different environment.

"There were a lot of solo practitioners. That was 45 years ago. That was very common," he said. "Now, you're seeing more multi-person practices, larger practices that have two or three veterinarians."

Wheeler said some practices have eight to 10 veterinarians. Many have diverse practices, caring for cattle, hogs, horses, poultry, dogs, cats, fish — both commercial and household — and a variety of other pets.

Veterinarians who devote their work to farm animals are growing rarer. The American Veterinary Medical Association reports that as of 2020, fewer than 2 percent of practices nationally are devoted to large-animal care, and less than 6 percent were mixed-animal clinics.

Wheeler said veterinarians have many of the same skills and knowledge base as medical doctors, with one notable exception.

"We're not working on one species, we're working on several," he said. "We wear a lot more hats overall than a medical doctor in most cases."

Wheeler said veterinarians have to be general practitioners, surgeons, gynecologists, X-ray technicians and more.

Reduce offerings

Drs. Dan and Loretta Berkland purchased the Sibley Veterinary Clinic in 1984. Dan is a graduate



Iowa Veterinary Medical Association executive director Dr. Randy Wheeler says there is a growing shortage of large-animal veterinarians in the state, especially those who work alone. Photo submitted

of Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine while Loretta attended school at the University of Pennsylvania.

Loretta said it is clear more veterinarians are pursuing small-animal care, and fewer are interested in livestock work, especially in emergency cases at various

times.

"It's much easier to find a small-animal emergency clinic from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.," she said. "We are seeing quite a bit of reduced offering of that service. We've been seeing quite a few emergencies

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Majority of veterinarians in U.S. female

Sibley practitioner Berkland: Females have special affinity

BY TOM LAWRENCE
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SIBLEY—Dr. Loretta Berkland graduated in 1983 with the first University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine class with more women than men — one more, to be precise.

Now, graduating classes skew heavily female as more than 60 percent of veterinarians in the United States are female.

"Women and animals are like women and children. It just seems like it's one of those professions that the mothering institute gravitates a person toward," Berkland said. "Not to say that the men don't have that same kind of love for pets and for animals. They do. But women, for whatever reason, are drawn toward animals."

Berkland has owned the Sibley Veterinary Clinic with her husband, Dr. Daniel Berkland, since 1984. They have one other veterinarian on staff, Dr. Ashley Hoogland.

Hoogland, who grew up near Hospers, earned her doctor of veterinary medicine degree from Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine in Ames in 2014 and then joined the Sibley Veterinary Clinic.

Loretta Berkland said she sees the connection between females and animals in her role as a 4-H leader, an equine superintendent and an equine veterinarian. A barn filled with horses reacts completely differently to a woman walking in compared to when a man enters, Berkland said.

"It just maybe has to do with timber of voice, it has to do with the way body language is," she said.

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HERDS & PLOWSHARES

Plan carefully to reduce losses of livestock forage

STORAGE

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matter losses can be limited to 15 to 25 percent or under the best management less than 5 percent. As the industry moved from uncovered pits to covered piles the quality improved dramatically.

Education is a key to reduce storage, and Hall said he gets questions on best management practices on a regular basis.

Dougherty said there still is more loss than would be ideal.

"It varies from farm to farm, but well-managed — well-packed

and covered — bunkers and piles typically have 15 to 20 percent total dry matter losses," he said. "Bags typically range from 10 to 15 percent. Losses can be 25 to over 50 percent in uncovered bunkers and piles. For dry hay, inside storage losses are 1 to 5 percent; outside on the ground for under nine months, 5 to 20 percent, and outside on ground for over a year, 15 to 50 percent dry matter loss."

Spoilage piles up in warmer conditions, Dougherty said.

"Losses will be lower during cold weather," he said. "The greatest risk for spoilage and dry matter loss is

during the summer months and during/after filling before the cover is put in place."

Dougherty said careful planning is essential before creating a storage area for forage.

"I encourage producers to use Google Earth Pro or some other free program to get measurements and sketch out facility layout before building anything," he said.

Last year's drought conditions greatly reduced grazing options for producers, and the USDA provided financial assistance through the Livestock Forage Disaster Program. Farmers in 36 Iowa counties were

eligible to apply for payments. The deadline to apply was Jan. 30.

Eligible livestock include alpacas, beef cattle, buffalo/bison, beefalo, dairy cattle, deer, elk, emus, equine, goats, llamas, reindeer or sheep that have been or would have been grazing the eligible grazing land or pastureland during the normal grazing period.

"Severe to extreme drought conditions in Iowa have resulted in significant economic hardships for our agricultural producers and livestock producers are no exception," said Matt Russell, the state executive director for the Farm Service Agency

in Iowa. Increasingly, cover crops are providing forage for Iowa farmers. In addition to reducing soil erosion, increasing soil organic material and soil health, they improve water quality.

The amount of acreage dedicated to cover crops, defined as "small grains, legumes, brassicas and others that are planted between cash crop seasons to keep a living cover on the landscape," according to Practical Farmers of Iowa, grew from less than 10,000 acres in 2009 to more than 2.2 million acres in 2019. However, the increase has slowed in recent years.

Avian flu and other factors cause rise in egg price

EGGS

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market," Ibarburu said. "The shell egg market sales decreased 4 percent, but the egg products market sales increased 5 percent. Total egg sales decreased 1 percent."

Still, the avian influenza that raced across the country in 2022, infecting poultry in at least 47 states, was a major blow to the egg industry. An estimated 57.8 million birds, including chickens, turkeys and ducks, were affected by avian flu last year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

That's up from the more than 50 million birds — more than 43 million of them chickens — affected by the 2015 outbreak, which was reported in 15 states and led to shell egg prices and liquid egg prices doubling.

The USDA, in a final report on the outbreak issued in 2016, said the costs were astronomical.

"For the 2014-15 outbreak, nearly \$850 million was obligated for response activities — including personnel support — and indemnity payments," the report stated. "Another \$100 million was made available for further preparedness activities: it was the most expensive animal health incident recorded in U.S. history."

The outbreak first spotted in 2022 has continued into this year. Iowa, the leading egg-producing state, had 25 affected commercial flocks, six affected backyard flocks, and more than 15.9 million birds infected in this outbreak as of Jan. 25, according to the USDA.

The avian flu is carried by wild birds, including ducks, turkeys, geese and swans, who pass it along through contact with domesticated poultry.

The bitter memories of 2015 taught producers about biosecurity and have prevented this outbreak from devastating the egg industry.

The Egg Safety Center offers these guidelines:

"Many egg farms house their hens indoors to prevent exposure to wild birds, waterfowl, pests and rodents that may spread disease. For the same reason, farms also limit movement of personnel, vehicles or equipment between farm operations," its website states.

"Egg farms only allow essential employees and service providers onto the farm, to limit the opportunity for disease to be accidentally carried onto the farm by vehicles or on visitors' clothing or footwear. Upon entry on the farm or into a barn, approved vehicles, footwear and equipment are disinfected using one of several methods."

By employing these levels of safety, egg producers hope to reduce infections and lessen their losses.

"I don't think the industry was prepared for the level of outbreak we had then," Emily Metz, president of the American Egg Board, told The Washington Post in January. "The good news about where we are right now with bird flu compared to 2015 is that our farmers learned a lot of hard lessons."

Ibarburu said there still are enough eggs to meet the demand for them.

"While total production in 2022 was 3.2 percent lower than 2021, there remains one hen per person in the U.S. that continues to lay an egg every day. This continues to keep egg supplies available for consumers," he said. "In Iowa, the 10-year production average is 14.9 billion eggs per year. The national 10-year production average is 92.3 billion eggs per year. We don't have data on how many egg farmers that includes."

Ibarburu said the news will get better, and prices will get lower, as the weather warms up.

"Egg prices depend on both supply and demand," he said. "As demand slows, prices or supplies expand, prices generally fall. In the absence of new avian influenza cases, supply will gradually increase over the next several months and that should help the market."



O'Brien among counties without Heritage Farm

Adams is other county, but application is filed

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REGIONAL—There are 1,685 Heritage Farms in Iowa as designated by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

To earn Heritage Farm status, a farm must still have at least 40 acres of the original holding of Iowa farmland. The ownership must have remained within the same family for 150 years or more by the end of the year an application was submitted, and the present owner must be related to a person who owned the land 150 years ago.

Heritage Farms are listed in 97 of Iowa's 99 counties.

Only two counties are without representation: Adams County in the southwest section of the state, and O'Brien County in N'West Iowa.

"O'Brien County has had many century awards over the years, but no heritage awards — yet," said Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship communications director Don McDowell, an O'Brien County native.

The majority of these historic farms are on the eastern edge of the state. There are 60 Heritage Farms in Dubuque County, and 54 each in Clinton and Winneshiek.

The farther west one looks on a map, the smaller the numbers grow. Five counties have just one Heritage Farm: Buena Vista, Clay, Hancock, Ida and Sac.

O'Brien's neighboring counties in this corner of the state, Lyon, Osceola and Sioux, have three each.

The lack of O'Brien County Heritage Farms is linked to the settlement patterns of the state.

"From an Iowa history perspective, eastern Iowa was settled before western Iowa, so there is always going to be more Heritage Farms in eastern Iowa before western Iowa catches up," McDowell said. "Makes sense, as Sheldon just celebrated 150 years in 2022."

O'Brien County might stand alone soon, since there has been an application from Adams County, according to Kelley Reece of the state agriculture department. Reece reviews the applications and determines which farms qualify for the lists.

The farm with the deepest roots in the same family, at least according to these programs, is owned by Onalee Walsh of Moorland in Webster County. Walsh can trace family ownership of the farm to 1844. It was recognized as a Century Farm in 2022, and while eligible for Heritage Farm status, it is not on the list and Walsh did not apply for that recognition.

The oldest Heritage Farms were

Iowa's multi-generational farm families are the backbone of our state, and the Century and Heritage Farm Program recognizes their hard work, strength, resilience and perseverance. Each year I look forward to recognizing these families, hearing their stories, and celebrating their legacies at the Iowa State Fair.

Mike Naig IOWA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND STEWARDSHIP COMMUNICATIONS SECRETARY

all recognized last year as well. Stacey and Jeremy Bakken of Fairfax in Linn County are part of a family that has owned the farm since 1844.

Bruce and Priscilla Poole of Stockport in Van Buren County trace their family ownership to 1845, and the farm of Patrick and Kathryn Curtin of Waukon has been in the family since 1848. It includes land in Allamakee and Winneshiek counties.

The Heritage Farm program started in 2006. It is a spinoff of the Iowa Century Farm program, which was created in 1976 in the spirit of the nation's bicentennial. There are 20,357 Century Farms, and they are spread across the state, with more than 800 of them in N'West.

There are 316 of them in Sioux County, 207 in O'Brien County, 166 in Lyon County and 133 in Osceola. Kossuth County in north-central Iowa has the most, with 390.

Farm owners can apply for the programs through June 1.

"Iowa's multi-generational farm families are the backbone of our state, and the Century and Heritage Farm Program recognizes their hard work, strength, resilience and perseverance," said secretary Mike Naig in announcing the annual application process.

"Each year I look forward to recognizing these families, hearing their stories, and celebrating their legacies at the Iowa State Fair."

The ceremonies recognizing the 2023 Century and Heritage Farm families will be held at the Iowa State Fair on Thursday, Aug. 17, in the historic Livestock Pavilion. Honorees will be notified in advance.

Neither Century nor Heritage Farm honors provide any significant reward.

"There are no financial benefits associated with the Century or Heritage farm award, it's simply a recognition and a significant point of family pride," McDowell said.

