



by John Goeser

Testing hybrids will pay bulk tank dividends

THANKSGIVING is my favorite holiday and one of the endeared celebratory times of the year, with its traditions. It also kicks off the holiday season for the weeks to follow.

Seemingly similar, the closing of the corn harvest for silage or grain marks the beginning of the seed corn sales season. During this time, we pick up seed brochures and begin delving into seed genetic options for the next growing season.



Goeser

The phone starts ringing

Annually during seed sales season, my phone rings with a different topic at hand. More frequently during this time of the year, the caller is looking for my thoughts regarding different seed genetics or technology. This topic may seem odd within our Feeding Fundamentals column; however, bear in mind that corn silage represents a substantial feed cost per hundredweight of milk produced.

Case in point, with a high-corn silage diet, a 500-cow dairy farm will have roughly \$250,000 invested into its corn silage after the feed is covered under plastic in fall. With a background in plant breeding and genetics, I am comfortable being pulled into seed corn discussions between the dairy owner or manager and nutritionists, agronomists, seed advisers, growers, and other key stakeholders.

Further incentive to author this column comes from a notable conversation with a nutritionist and his dairy client regarding which seed company's hybrid with the brown-midrib (BMR) mutation would be best relative to the quoted seed prices for the dairy. My response in this case was, "I don't know; what

more information about yield or quality do we have?" The answer was, "Not much."

To be honest, there's a heck of a lot that I don't know or understand. However, I recognize we need reputable data to make economically impactful decisions.

In the past, I've used hybrid insights from different growers or fields, but new experience has shown us that hybrid yield or quality data can be entirely wrong if not captured from similar agronomic conditions and management. Soil fertility, planting density, and other factors can completely change how silage feeds. This means you should be extremely cautious when interpreting silage quality or yield data from different fields or years.

An evolving topic

Seed companies, advisers, and agronomists have great experience with their genetics and the interactions between the seed choice and the soil or growing environment. Their expertise is increasingly important, as the growing environment and conditions have been wildly volatile the past five years. Combined with the seed industry's expertise, I've increasingly recognized the need for further objective plot insight and data detailing how Company A compares with Company B, or how Hybrid Y stacks up against Hybrid Z on your dairy's fields.

For whatever reason, we seem to be getting less of these much needed

plot insights over the past few years, and we're missing valuable data ahead of making decisions. This realization is a common thread to seed corn questions that I've been picking up on.

Plant your own plot

Hence, I contend it's time that dairy owners and growers take more ownership of the seed corn genetics evaluation process. Recognizing there are hundreds of thousands of dollars at stake, consider putting in plans for an objective seed plot to help your dairy compete and succeed in 2022.

If you're an avid reader of my column, you'll recognize that I'm regularly advocating for a team approach. In this situation, the discussion is no different, as your farm should take a team approach to plant objective seed corn evaluation plots. In some cases, the effort may involve getting out seed plot planters and seeding various hybrids on your farm. In others, you may opt to plant several hybrids within a field using your current equipment.

In either case, the hybrids need to be planted in the same field or fields due to the fact that the environment and genotype interaction is substantial for yield and quality. In reality, the best way to truly assess the genetic potential within the year is to plant candidate hybrids several times over as a set and then compare the rankings.

Think of this like proving a bull

by evaluating many thousands of daughters . . . more data gives us a better idea of the true genetic potential. Any added replication in the seed plot on your farm will help us sort out the best hybrids, like we discussed in the September 10 Feeding Fundamentals column on page 538 titled, "Repetition brings strength, consistency, and accuracy."

There's a cost

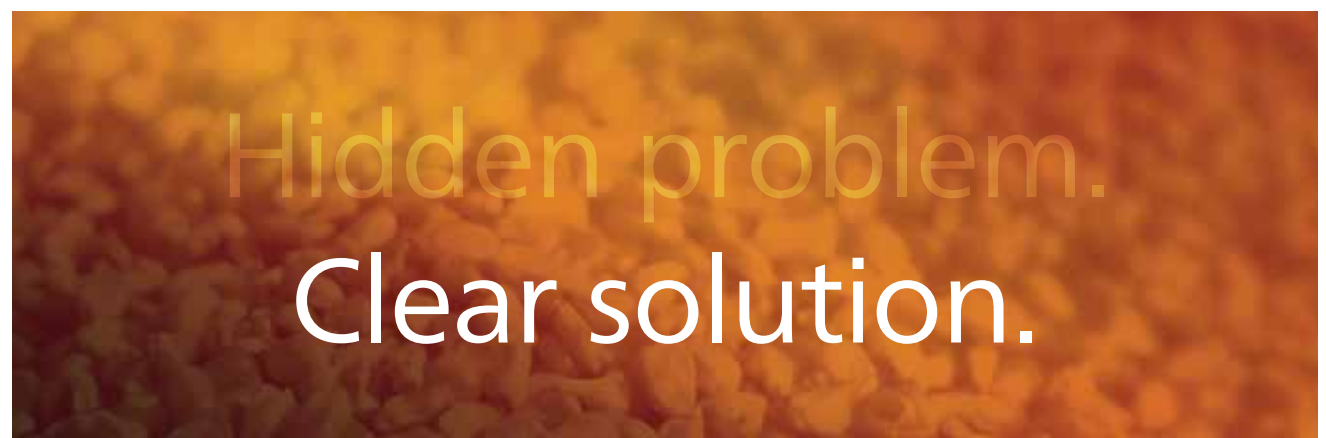
This new seed plot effort is not to be taken lightly, and I recognize that. In proposing this concept with a well-respected dairy recently, they balked at the prospect of taking on this additional effort and labor in 2022. Labor is certainly a pain point; however, I'm certain there are sizable margin opportunities at play for dairies willing to make the effort. I wouldn't be surprised if seed genetics could equate to 50 cents per hundredweight (cwt.) or more in feed cost opportunities through more forage energy and better feed conversion efficiency.

Ultimately, with the help of your nutritionist, seed advisers, agronomists, and your field team, I'm of the belief that we can better evaluate seed genetics through on-farm plots. Consider making this a new seasonal tradition for your farm. With more robust plot data in hand, you can make the right choices to optimize not only your silage quality and yield, but more importantly, your dairy business' performance from the field through your cows. 🐄

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"The dairy must've had a banner year or we'd be wintering in the barn."



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