

Considerations for Safe Silage Harvesting

Silage remains a popular feed source for dairies, beef feedlots, and cow/calf producers because of high digestibility, easy feeding ability, and minimal loss of nutrients from harvest through storage.

Large equipment is necessary for harvesting silage for two reasons:

1. To produce the highest quality silage, the fodder must be processed to very small pieces. This requires equipment with an immense amount of horsepower.
2. The ensiling process requires much higher moisture than dry hay or grain would normally be harvested at. A cubic foot of silage could be as much as 50% heavier depending on moisture content thus large equipment is needed to accommodate the weight.

As with all equipment, workers should be trained on equipment before operating. Training should include: how to operate the machine safely, hazards identification and corrective actions, and blind spot awareness.

Here are some safety tips to keep in mind during silage harvesting operations.

1. Stay clear of all machinery while the engine is running. The safest way to repair or perform routine maintenance on silage equipment is with the machine engine off/deenergized, and the key in your pocket.
2. Ensure all persons are aware of the operations for the day and what each person's role will be.
3. Make sure that all persons know how to perform their job safely.
4. Utilize a spotter when working near ground piles and bunkers.
5. Wear a high-visibility safety vest.
6. Minimize the amount of backing up required as silage hauling equipment tends to have large blind spots.
7. Ground piles and bunkers should not be filled higher than the unloading equipment can safely reach. Excessively tall piles are nearly impossible to unload safely.
8. When loading/unloading from a ground pile or bunker persons on foot, stay a safe distance from the pile. A good rule of thumb is at least three times the piles' height.
9. When filling upright silos, no persons should make entry into the silo for minimum 3 weeks after filling is completed.
10. All equipment used in "packing" operations for ground piles and bunkers should be equipped with roll-over protection and seatbelt for the operator.
11. Use signs to designate a traffic pattern for hauling equipment, pushing equipment, and packing equipment.
12. When sampling silage, take samples from a loader bucket, after it has been moved a safe distance from the pile.