

IMMATURE SOYBEANS FOR CATTLE FORAGE

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The dry weather in many areas of the state has resulted in soybeans not maturing and the potential “beah” yield will be severely reduced.

There is "good news" and "bad news." The "good news" is that the forage growth of soybeans can be an excellent feed for cattle. The "bad news" is that the herbicide used to control weeds might not allow the forage to be fed as hay or grazed by cattle. If you have beef producers contact you about grazing or harvesting immature soybeans for cattle feed, emphasize to them to be sure and read the label for feeding restrictions.

If there are no herbicide restrictions, the forage can be an excellent cattle feed. Nutrient content will be similar to other legume forages. As with any forage, maturity will affect nutrient content.

TABLE 1

Quality of Soybean Forage As Influenced By Maturity¹

Maturity	DM% ^a	CP% ^a	ADF% ^a	NDF% ^a
Bloom	18.9	20.1	28.2	38.7
Pod	18.3	18.1	31.9	43.1
Seed	20.3	18.2	33.7	33.7
Mature	34.2	19.2	29.7	40.7

¹University of Wisconsin. 1987 and 1989.

^aDM=Dry Matter, CP=Crude Protein, ADF=Acid Detergent Fiber, NDF=Neutral Detergent Fiber

Based on data in Table 1, harvest could be done at about any storage of maturity. But, once the lower leaves begin to turn yellow and drop, harvest must be done to avoid leaf loss. As leaves drop, crude protein drops.

Soybeans cut for silage should be wilted to increase dry matter, The dry matter level needed would depend on storage method. With trench silos or bags of silage should be 30-35%, with conventional upright silos, 40 to 50%. Soybean silage can be mixed with corn silage before ensiling. Mix one part soybeans to two parts corn silage.

Cattle will consume soybean hay or silage if it is properly harvested and stored. A forage test is recommended to get an estimate of nutritional value.

If soybean forage is harvested for hay, expect it to be stemmy. Manage harvesting procedures to cut leaf loss. Stems will be hard to dry and as a consequence, mold is apt to occur. Hay will be dusty.

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