We don’t always see forage losses, but they can accumulate in a hurry. From the field to the cow’s mouth, as much as 60% of forage dry matter can be lost on farms. However, with good forage management, this loss can be reduced to as little as 15%.

Comparison of potential DM losses with good vs. poor management & conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management &amp; Conditions</th>
<th>Whole Plant in Field</th>
<th>Fed to Animals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>15% Loss</td>
<td>85% DM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>60% Loss</td>
<td>40% DM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Range of potential DM losses with good vs. poor management & conditions

- **Field & harvest**: 5% to 5%
- **Ensilage**: 5% to 15%
- **Feed-out**: 5% to 20%

Forage losses are more costly than ever

With ensiling, the loss in dry matter does not occur equally across nutrients; easily available carbohydrates, such as energy-rich sugars, disappear in greater proportion than fiber or protein.

Therefore, when dry matter losses are great, you not only have less silage to feed; you also have poorer quality silage to feed. And this usually means more corn must be added to the ration to provide energy.
What’s causing these losses and how can they be minimized?

**Field and harvest losses**

Caused by:
- Slow drying – respiration losses
- Rain damage
- Mechanical losses

Can be minimized by:
- Conditioning the crop properly; laying the forage out wide to dry

**Feed-out losses**

Caused by:
- Low feed-out rate off the silo face

Can be minimized by:
- 4” per day from tower silos
- 6” per day from bunkers and piles
- 12” per day from bags

**Ensiling losses**

Caused by:
- Not ensiling at the right dry matter content for the silo type
- Low silage density
- Not keeping oxygen out

Can be minimized by:
- Ensiling at:
  - 30-40% DM in bunkers, bags and piles
  - 40-50% DM in concrete stave towers
  - 45-55% DM in oxygen-limiting towers
- Using heavy tractors and plenty of packing time when filling bunkers and piles
- Sealing bunkers and piles well with plastic
- Monitoring and patching plastic on bunkers, piles and bags