

## Hay Harvesting Tips for Failed Corn Crops

With the current drought, some producers are interested in baling failed corn crops as hay. While this is certainly feasible, there are some challenges associated with swathing and baling corn residue. Anyone who has baled corn stalks into round bales knows the challenge of forming and tying a good bale. Starting with a standing corn crop creates additional challenges as compared to traditional hay crops in Oklahoma.

You can swath the crop with most mowers, but a disc-mower is preferred. Stalk strength might be challenging for mowers with a sickle and you should consider operating slower with a sickle-mower. If you use a sickle, make sure you have sickle sections, guards, and pickup teeth on hand in the field because you are sure to break a few. You may want to consider tilting the cutterbar up a little to avoid the tough brace roots on corn plants. This may require some 'trial and error' to find the adjustment that works best.



Some type of conditioning is necessary to help get the crop dry enough to bale. It should be less than 20% moisture, preferably 15%, when it is baled. If you have access to a mower-conditioner with double conditioner rolls (4 rolls total) it may do a better job on the tough corn stalks than the standard two roller systems. In either case, make sure the conditioner is adjusted properly. On standard two roll conditioners, this includes the space between rolls and proper spring tension. The corn crop will likely create a thicker mat of material passing between the rolls than is typically seen in hay crops. It also has much stronger stalks. Thus most mower conditioners used in Oklahoma are not set correctly to pull into the field and harvest corn for hay.

If you are placing the corn in a windrow, set the windrow width to 12" less than my baler pickup, so it is easier to pick up with the baler. If you are cutting the material now and the crop is on the small side, it should be ready to bale within 5 days without turning. If you have a moderate size crop, you might consider turning the material after about 3 days.

The biggest issue during baling will likely be feeding long and unbroken stalks. Picking the material up off the ground may be tough. If you don't rake it, then bale in the opposite direction as swathed. Dirt will likely be a problem during baling. Just like swathing, picking the corn crop off the ground is also hard on equipment. Have some spare pickup teeth on hand while in the field. The long, unbroken stalks can also cause problems when forming the bale. The larger diameter of corn stalks makes bales more challenging to form when compared to traditional hay crops. Net wrapping on round bales is preferred as it will help hold the bale together, 3.5 to 4 wraps is recommended to insure the bales are secure enough for good handling. If not, use plenty of twine. Check bale tension to make sure you are forming a good bale. Making heavier bales is likely the way to go.

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