

# Scouting Program for Silage Growers

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## Needs Statement

Silage is the largest acreage and highest value row crop grown in Wilkes County. Annually, the value of silage to Wilkes County equates to over \$4 million to local producers. In Wilkes County there are no local crop consultants, which leads to growers relying heavily on UGA Extension Agents for proper pesticide recommendations and insight on local agronomic issues. The Wilkes County Extension Agent started a local county silage scouting program to increase Extension's presence in the local farming community, increase grower knowledge of problematic pests found within the County, and to provide recommendations for control.

## Situation

In silage production, fertility, seeding rates, disease prevention, pest control, and protection of leaf matter is critically important to insuring maximum tonnage and feed values for cattle. In 2020, approximately 3,000 acres of corn and sorghum silage were grown to support approximately 1,300 dairy cattle and over 3,000 beef stocker cattle. Both corn and sorghum silage crops had major disease and pest problems during the 2020 growing season. These diseases and pest pressures included: Southern Rust in corn, fall armyworm pressure in corn and forage sorghum, white sugarcane aphid in forage sorghum, and sorghum anthracnose pressure. Disease and pest pressure were elevated during the 2020 growing season due to higher annual rainfall and an abnormally warm winter.



## Response

Silage growers rely heavily on UGA Extension Agents for agronomic advice, pest identification, and pesticide recommendations. In response to county silage growers needs, the Wilkes County Agent conducted a local county silage scouting programs weekly to provide growers with information on local field conditions seen along with disease and insect pressures that could affect silage yields and quality. This increase in grower knowledge resulted in timely application of based university recommendations for pest and disease control. This in-turn increased grower yields and saved money by determining a field by field pesticide application need.

## Impact

The silage scouting program led to recommendation for increased seeding depths in corn by half an inch. This recommendation was implemented on 600 acres and showed an improved timing of emergence in crop and 20 bushel per acre increase when compared to prior season. The scouting program found and properly identified Southern Rust on September 8, 2020. This led to a late application of a preventative fungicide on 95 acres second rotation silage corn. Early detection of a very aggressive sorghum anthracnose disease resulted in application of fungicide on 150 acres of late silage sorghum. Application of fungicide on sorghum increased total yield by an average 2 tons per acre (\$50 per ton) when compared to other fields in the area that were not treated. Through the scouting program, the agent recommended not spraying 75 acres of silage sorghum with insecticide for fall armyworm resulting in grower savings of \$1,125. Additional recommendations through scouting program included a late application of insecticide on only 120 acres of 220 acres of silage sorghum to slow the spread of white sugarcane aphids resulting in grower savings of \$2,300. In total, the scouting program increased yield and resulted in actual grower saving \$3,425 through not recommending grower applications of pesticides. Growers who participated in the program rated the program as excellent and requested the Wilkes County Extension Agent continue the program next year.

