

Silage feeding for laying hens

Problem

Utfodring av ensilage till ekologiska värphöns utövas dagligen av många äggproducenter. Eftersom höns kan äta stora mängder ensilage är det viktigt att använda högkvalitativt ensilage.

Lösning

Olika typer av ensilage kan användas. Emellertid kan t.ex. gräs, klövergräs, alfalfa, hampa, hästbönor, lupiner och solrosensilage ha ofta högre proteinhalt än t.ex. korn/ärter eller majsensilage (endast hela plantan eller kolvarna). En kemisk analys av det skördade ensilaget är viktigt för att kunna uppskatta kvaliteten.

Benefits

High-quality silage can provide nutrients for the hen and encourage natural foraging behaviour, thus reducing the risk for feather pecking. Growing protein-rich silage helps increase self-sufficiency and improve the crop rotation of the organic poultry farms.

Applicability box

Theme

Djurhållning - Foder- och utfodringsstrategier - Production systems
- Poultry - Ration planning

Geographical coverage

Global

Application time

Feeding silage on a daily basis all year.
The amount given depends on hen age and silage type.

Period of impact

During the entire laying period.

Equipment

Silage chopper, automatic system (robot) to feed the silage 1-3 times per day in the barn.

Best in

Choice of silage will depend on the soil type and if the land is often dry or waterlogged. The silages should be harvested as whole crops.

Practical Recommendations

- Choose the silage type(s) that provides the best yield and quality, depending on soil type and weather conditions.
- The silage has to be finely chopped.
- Silage generally has to be preserved under proper conditions to optimize the fermentation process.
- Analyse the protein content of the silage and other nutrients if possible.
- Avoid silage with anti-nutritional factors.
- Investing in an automatic feeding system (robot) is recommended for larger flocks to distribute the silage evenly and encourage the hens to eat it.
- Including the chemical content of the silage in the feed formulation could be an advantage, when feeding more than 20 g silage (wet weight) per hen per day.



Figure 1: Laying hens on a veranda feeding silage distributed by an automatic system (robot). Photo: Sanna Steinfeldt, AU



Figure 2: Barley-pea silage for laying hens. Photo: Niels Finn Johansen, SEGES

Further information

Weblinks

- [This video](#) provides further instructions on feeding silage to layers (in Danish).
- On the website of [Økologisk Landsforening 2019](#), there is an overview of the most important feed materials for self-supply of organic poultry with dry feed and silage. You can download and print listings of data on each crop and information on cultivation, crop rotation, harvesting, storage, nutrient content and nutritional considerations (in Danish).
- Check the Organic Farm Knowledge platform for more [practical recommendation on animal husbandry](#).

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**OK-Net EcoFeed:**

<https://orgprints.org/view/projects/OKNetEcoFeed.html>

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Project website: <https://ok-net-ecofeed.eu/>

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