



**Interpreting Mold Count Information**

L. E. Chase <sup>1</sup> and G.C. Bergstrom <sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Department of Animal Science  
<sup>2</sup>Department of Plant Pathology  
 Cornell University

One analysis available to producers from some forage testing labs is a count of the number of yeasts and/or molds present in feeds. This information provides only a total count but does not provide a breakdown of the type or species in the feed. The information linking the quantity of yeasts or molds in feeds to animal intake or performance is very limited for dairy cattle.

There are a number of factors that are influenced by the presence of molds in silages. These include:

- Spoilage and dry matter losses
- Decreased feed energy value (5-10 %?). This may be reflected by lower predicted energy values from forage analysis.
- There may be a decrease in the vitamin and amino acid content of the silage
- There may be an effect on palatability which could alter dry matter intake
- There may be an increased incidence of digestive disorders and abortions.
- There may be increased variability in the consistency of the manure.
- There can be an increased rate of heating and spoilage in the silo and feedbunk.

The following guidelines can be used in interpreting mold count information. It is important to remember that these guidelines are “best estimates.”

Mold count (per gram)	Guideline <sup>a</sup>
< 500,000	Relatively low count, OK to feed
500,000 to 1 million	Relatively safe
1 to 2 million	Feed with caution, discount feed energy value by 5%
2 to 5 million	Discount feed energy value by 5%, consider diluting with other feeds. Watch animals for: Dry matter intake variation Digestive upsets Manure consistency
> 5 million	Discontinue feeding

<sup>a</sup> Adapted from Mimeo DAS 93-21, Dept. of Dairy and Animal Science, The Pennsylvania State University

