

## Journal of the Hellenic Veterinary Medical Society

Vol 76, No 1 (2025)



### The evaluation of nutrient compositions of alfalfa hay and corn silage used in dairy farms in Marmara Region, Türkiye

Ç Kara, E Ürkmez, A Acar, E Abdullahoğlu, A Orman, M Efil, N Karslıoğlu Kara, AC Gök

doi: [10.12681/jhvms.37483](https://doi.org/10.12681/jhvms.37483)

Copyright © 2025, Ç Kara, E Ürkmez, A Acar, E Abdullahoğlu, A Orman, M Efil, N Karslıoğlu Kara, AC Gök



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

#### To cite this article:

Kara, Ç, Ürkmez, E., Acar, A., Abdullahoğlu, E., Orman, A., Efil, M., Karslıoğlu Kara, N., & Gök, A. (2025). The evaluation of nutrient compositions of alfalfa hay and corn silage used in dairy farms in Marmara Region, Türkiye. *Journal of the Hellenic Veterinary Medical Society*, 76(1), 8741–8748. <https://doi.org/10.12681/jhvms.37483>

## The evaluation of nutrient compositions of alfalfa hay and corn silage used in dairy farms in Marmara Region, Türkiye

Ç. Kara<sup>1\*</sup>, E. Ürkmez<sup>1</sup>, A. Acar<sup>1</sup>, E. Abdullahoğlu<sup>1</sup>, A. Orman<sup>2</sup>, M. Efil<sup>1</sup>,  
N. Karshoğlu Kara<sup>3</sup>, A.C. Gök<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bursa Uludag University, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Department of Animal Nutrition and Nutritional Diseases, 16059 Görükle, Bursa, Türkiye

<sup>2</sup>Bursa Uludag University, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Department of Zootechnics, 16059 Görükle, Bursa, Türkiye

<sup>3</sup>Bursa Uludağ University, Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Animal Science, 16059 Görükle, Bursa, Türkiye

**ABSTRACT:** The study aimed to demonstrate the nutritional variations of alfalfa hays and corn silages used in dairy farms in Marmara Region, Türkiye. In addition, the present study was conducted to evaluate the relative feed value (RFV) and total digestible nutrients (TDN) levels of these forages. Twenty diverse alfalfa hay and twenty-six diverse corn silage samples were taken from dairy farms (n=17) with a minimum of 50 lactating cows in Marmara Region throughout 12 months. The highest variations in nutrient composition for alfalfa hay samples were found for neutral detergent fiber (NDF) and acid detergent fiber (ADF) levels. The highest variations concerning the nutrient content of corn silage samples were observed for starch, NDF and ADF values. Correlations between RFV and TDN equations and RFV and crude protein (CP) were significant for alfalfa hay (P<0.001). Correlations between RFV and TDN equations and RFV and starch content were significant for corn silage (P<0.001). RFV calculation can be used as an indicator for evaluating the quality of alfalfa hay according to our results of the correlations between RFV and TDN equations and the RFV and CP content. In addition, RFV for corn silage can be considered with respect to the quality evaluation because of the significant correlations between RFV and TDN equations and RFV and starch content. The results obtained from our study will contribute to the database of nutrient compositions of alfalfa hay and corn silage.

**Keywords:** Alfalfa hay; corn silage; nutrient compositions

*Corresponding Author:*

Çağdaş Kara, Bursa Uludag University, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Department of Animal Nutrition and Nutritional Diseases, 16059 Görükle, Bursa, Türkiye  
E-mail address: cagdaskara@uludag.edu.tr

*Date of initial submission: 18-04-2024*  
*Date of acceptance: 14-11-2024*

## INTRODUCTION

Forages are crucial for ruminant rations in point of providing energy, protein and minerals as well as fiber for rumination and rumen health (Ranjbar, 2007; Linn et al., 2014; Guo et al., 2022). In many ruminant rations, forages can contribute more than half of the total dry matter intake and are major sources of dietary neutral detergent fiber (NDF). High quality forages in respect to nutrient composition, digestibility and palatability can promote feed intake, ration digestibility and animal productivity and lead to more profits (Allen, 1996; Guo et al., 2022). Alfalfa hay (Radović et al., 2009; Farhang et al., 2010; Kahyani et al., 2019) and corn silage (Fernandez et al., 2004; Kahyani et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023) are widely used as forage sources in dairy cattle diets. Alfalfa is the most cultivated legume forage worldwide and is used for dairy cattle nutrition in different forms. Alfalfa is stored as hay or silage for using in the dairy farms (Radović et al., 2009; Li and Brummer, 2012). Alfalfa is considered to be the most important forage crop for providing protein to dairy cattle (Radović et al., 2009; Blume et al., 2021). The previous data have shown that nutrient composition of alfalfa hay is greatly variable (Abaş et al., 2005; İnal et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). The factors affecting nutrient composition of alfalfa hay are field conditions, irrigation, soil structure, fertilization, plant variety, growing stage at harvest, different cutting stages of vegetation, drying method, the duration of drying phase, storage conditions and the duration of storage (Linn et al., 2014; Blume et al., 2021; Filik and Ertürk, 2023). Corn silage is palatable forage that provides effective fiber, starch and moisture to the total mixed ration (Leonardi et al., 2005; Chávez et al., 2022). Most lactating dairy cow rations include high amount of corn silage as the main forage source (Khan et al., 2015; Zardin et al., 2017). In the previous data, it has been shown that nutrient content of corn silage is quite variable (Khan et al., 2015; Tharangani et al., 2021; Chávez et al., 2022). Nutrient composition of corn silage is dependent on field conditions, irrigation, soil structure, fertilization, plant variety, the stage of maturity at harvest, kernel processing, theoretical length of cut, cutting height, the use of silage additives, storage condition and the length of storage (Ferraretto et al., 2018; Tharangani et al., 2021; Özkan, 2024).

Different evaluation systems have been developed to predict the quality of forages given to ruminants (Moore and Undersander, 2002; Hackmann et al., 2008). Relative feed value (RFV) is the one of param-

eters used to describe forage quality. RFV is determined by neutral detergent fiber (NDF) and acid detergent fiber (ADF) contents of the forage. The NDF content is correlated with dry matter intake since it evaluates the bulkiness of the forage and the ADF content is closely related to digestibility of the forage. RFV is calculated by using dry matter intake and digestible dry matter values. Dry matter intake is calculated by using NDF and digestible dry matter is calculated by using ADF (Rohweder et al., 1978; Moore and Undersander, 2002; Ward, 2014). In addition, the term of forage quality includes nutritive value referring to total digestible nutrients (TDN) and nutrient contents. TDN equation used for estimating energy content of individual feedstuffs or diets is considered as an indicator in defining forage quality. Different equations based on research results have been used for calculating TDN of feeds (NRC, 2001; Owens et al., 2010).

The Marmara Region, located in the west of Türkiye and bordering Greece and Bulgaria, is one of the most important livestock production areas in Türkiye. The study aimed to demonstrate the nutritional variations of alfalfa hays and corn silages used in dairy farms in Marmara Region. In addition, the present study was conducted to evaluate relative feed value (RFV) and total digestible nutrients (TDN) levels of these forages.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was supported by Bursa Uludag University in Bursa-Türkiye, located within 40° north latitude and 29° east longitude, The Unit of Scientific Research Projects (Project number: AYP(V)-2016/5). In this study, twenty diverse alfalfa hay and twenty-six diverse corn silage samples were taken from dairy farms (n=17) with a minimum of 50 lactating cows in Marmara Region, Türkiye throughout 12 months. Each forage sample, both alfalfa hay and corn silage, was collected in different periods of the year. Each alfalfa hay sample was collected from the center of five bales. Corn silage samples were taken from the center of the bunker silo at least 8 weeks after ensiling. Ensiling storage time of silages ranged 8-16 weeks.

Alfalfa hay samples were ground using a laboratory mill through a 1 mm screen for chemical analyses and then dried in an oven at 105 °C overnight. Corn silage samples were dried in a forced-air oven at 60 °C for 72 hours for the determination of the dry matter and ground using a laboratory mill through a

1 mm screen for chemical analyses. Nutrient analyses (crude protein, ether extract, starch and crude ash) of alfalfa hay and corn silage samples were performed according to AOAC (2003) and neutral detergent fiber (NDF), acid detergent fiber (ADF), acid detergent lignin (ADL), NDF insoluble protein (NDFIP) and ADF insoluble protein (ADFIP) analyses were performed as described by Van Soest et al. (1991) and Licitra et al. (1996). Nutrient compositions of alfalfa hays and corn silages were analyzed in Department of Animal Nutrition and Nutritional Diseases, Bursa Uludag University Veterinary Faculty. TDN values (TDN<sub>nrc</sub>) of alfalfa hay and corn silage were calculated by NRC (2001) equation. In addition, other TDN calculations (TDN1 for alfalfa hay and TDN2 and TDN3 for corn silage) were performed according to NFTA (2014). TDN<sub>nrc</sub>, TDN1, TDN2, TDN3 and relative feed values (RFV) were calculated as follows:

$$\text{TDN}_{\text{nrc}} = \text{tdNFC} + \text{tdCP} + (\text{tdFA} \times 2.25) + \text{tdNDF} - 7$$

(td: total digestible, NFC: nonfiber carbohydrate, CP: crude protein, FA: FA represents the fatty acid fraction that is estimated as crude fat - 1, NDF: neutral detergent fiber)

$$\text{TDN1 for alfalfa hay} = 82.38 - 0.7515 \times \text{ADF}$$

$$\text{TDN2 for corn silage} = 87.84 - 0.7 \times \text{ADF}$$

$$\text{TDN3 for corn silage} = 31.4 + (53.1 \times (0.94 - 0.008 \times \text{ADF}))$$

(ADF: acid detergent fiber)

$$\text{Relative feed value (RFV)} = (\text{DDM} \times \text{DMI}) / 1.29$$

(DDM: digestible dry matter = 88.9 - 0.779 x ADF), (DMI: dry matter intake as % of body weight = 120 / NDF)

The Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated between RFV and TDN equations (TDN<sub>nrc</sub> and TDN1) and RFV and crude protein for alfalfa hay and between RFV and TDN equations (TDN<sub>nrc</sub>, TDN2 and TDN3) and RFV and starch content for corn silage. Statistical analyses were performed by using the SPSS (2021) package program. Correlations with P<0.05 were considered significant. The confidence level was 95% in all analyses.

## RESULTS

In this study, seventeen dairy farms in Marmara Region were visited. These dairy farms had lactating cows between 50 and 800 and were chosen to represent an intensive dairy farming system. Lactating cows were fed total mixed rations in the dairy farms that alfalfa hay and corn silage samples were taken. The mean milk production ranged from 23.2 to 33.8 l/day in the dairy farms. 4 of 17, 2 of 17, 1 of 17, 4 of 17, 1 of 17, 1 of 17, 3 of 17 and 1 of 17 dairy farms were from Bursa, Sakarya, Kocaeli, Balıkesir, Edirne, Yalova, Kırklareli and Çanakkale, respectively.

Nutrient contents of alfalfa hays (n=20) and corn silages (n=26) were presented in Table 1 and Table 2 as minimum, maximum and mean values, respectively. Dry matter, crude ash, ether extract, crude protein, NDF, ADF and ADL levels of alfalfa hay samples were between 89.58 and 96.36%, 7.92 and 11.62%, 1.15 and 2.69%, 9.98 and 18.36%, 39.53 and 57.83%, 33.36 and 52.37%, 7.97 and 13.33%, respectively. Dry matter, crude ash, ether extract, crude protein, starch, NDF, ADF and ADL contents of corn silage samples were between 26.39 and 36.50%, 3.47 and 8.85%, 2.27 and 4.94%, 5.97 and 8.71%, 9.67 and 36.43%, 35.80 and 56.64%, 21.62 and 34.75%, 2.92 and 7.28%, respectively.

Relative feed values (RFV) and TDN values of

**Table 1.** Nutrient contents of alfalfa hay (n=20) on a dry matter basis.

Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard error	Standard deviation
Dry matter (%)	89.58	96.36	93.43	0.40	1.82
Crude ash (%)	7.92	11.62	9.91	0.21	0.96
Ether extract (%)	1.15	2.69	1.89	0.09	0.43
Crude protein (%)	9.98	18.36	14.71	0.43	1.93
NDF (%)	39.53	57.83	47.26	1.12	5.02
ADF (%)	33.36	52.37	41.68	1.01	4.52
ADL (%)	7.97	13.33	10.58	0.40	1.80

NDF: neutral detergent fiber, ADF: acid detergent fiber, ADL: acid detergent lignin

alfalfa hays were given in Table 3 as minimum, maximum and mean values. In Table 4, RFV and TDN values of corn silages were presented as minimum, maximum and mean values. Results of correlation coefficients between RFV and TDN equations (TDN<sub>nrc</sub> and TDN1) and RFV and crude protein of alfalfa hay were given in Table 5. Correlations between RFV and TDN equations and RFV and crude protein

were significant for alfalfa hay ( $P < 0.001$ ). Results of correlation coefficients between RFV and TDN equations (TDN<sub>nrc</sub>, TDN2 and TDN3) and RFV and starch content of corn silage were presented in Table 6. Correlations between RFV and TDN equations and RFV and starch content were significant for corn silage ( $P < 0.001$ ).

**Table 2.** Nutrient contents of corn silage (n=26) on a dry matter basis.

Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard error	Standard deviation
Dry matter (%)	26.39	36.50	31.24	0.58	2.95
Crude ash (%)	3.47	8.85	5.65	0.25	1.28
Ether extract (%)	2.27	4.94	3.67	0.12	0.66
Crude protein (%)	5.97	8.71	7.06	0.11	0.57
Starch (%)	9.67	36.43	24.92	1.28	6.52
NDF (%)	35.80	56.64	44.38	1.09	5.59
ADF (%)	21.62	34.75	28.02	0.69	3.53
ADL (%)	2.92	7.28	5.31	0.19	0.99

NDF: neutral detergent fiber, ADF: acid detergent fiber, ADL: acid detergent lignin

**Table 3.** RFV and TDN values of alfalfa hays (n=20).

Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard error	Standard deviation
RFV	77.38	147.01	112.84	4.10	18.35
TDN <sub>nrc</sub>	41.99	58.06	51.50	0.82	3.67
TDN1	43.02	57.31	51.05	0.76	3.40

RFV: relative feed value, TDN: total digestible nutrients, TDN<sub>nrc</sub>: TDN calculated by NRC (2001) equation, TDN1: TDN calculated according to NFTA (2014).

**Table 4.** RFV and TDN values of corn silages (n=26).

Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard error	Standard deviation
RFV	101.55	185.03	143.25	4.45	22.68
TDN <sub>nrc</sub>	59.24	72.59	65.50	0.63	3.23
TDN2	63.52	72.71	68.22	0.49	2.47
TDN3	66.55	72.13	69.41	0.29	1.50

RFV: relative feed value, TDN: total digestible nutrients, TDN<sub>nrc</sub>: TDN calculated by NRC (2001) equation, TDN2 and TDN3: TDN calculated according to NFTA (2014).

**Table 5.** Correlation coefficients between RFV and TDN equations and RFV and CP content of alfalfa hay.

	TDN <sub>nrc</sub>	TDN1	CP	P-value
RFV	0.87	0.92	0.81	<0.001

RFV: relative feed value, TDN: total digestible nutrients, TDN<sub>nrc</sub>: TDN calculated by NRC (2001) equation, TDN1: TDN calculated according to NFTA (2014), CP: crude protein.

**Table 6.** Correlation coefficients between RFV and TDN equations and RFV and starch content of corn silage.

	TDN <sub>nrc</sub>	TDN2	TDN3	Starch	P-value
RFV	0.70	0.91	0.91	0.83	<0.001

RFV: relative feed value, TDN: total digestible nutrients, TDN<sub>nrc</sub>: TDN calculated by NRC (2001) equation, TDN2 and TDN3: TDN calculated according to NFTA (2014).

## DISCUSSION

In the current study, nutrient contents of alfalfa hay samples collected from dairy farms varied at different levels. The highest variations in nutrient composition for alfalfa hay samples were found for NDF and ADF values. Similarly, nutrient compositions of corn silage samples collected from dairy farms were variable at different levels. The highest variations concerning nutrient composition of corn silage samples were observed for starch, NDF and ADF levels.

Alfalfa is the most valuable forage used as crude protein source in ruminant nutrition (Mirzaei-Aghsaghali et al., 2008; Radović et al., 2009; Blume et al., 2021). In our study, it was observed that different alfalfa hay samples collected from dairy farms had a wide variety with regard to CP content as well as NDF and ADF levels. The factors affecting nutrient composition of alfalfa hay are field conditions, irrigation, soil structure, fertilization, plant variety, growing stage at harvest, different cutting stages of vegetation, drying method, the duration of drying phase, storage conditions and the duration of storage (Linn et al., 2014; Blume et al., 2021; Filik and Ertürk, 2023). Minimum and maximum values of CP and crude ash for alfalfa hays in our study were in agreement with the results reported by Ünalp (2014), who analyzed nutrient compositions of alfalfa hays in different cutting and growth stages of vegetation in Aydın, Türkiye. We observed similar results for crude ash, ether extract and ADL contents of alfalfa hay samples compared with minimum and maximum values for these parameters of alfalfa hays produced in Kırıkkale, Türkiye (Güngör et al., 2008). In the study conducted by İnal et al. (2020), the ranges between minimum and maximum values of crude protein, ether extract, crude ash, NDF, ADF and ADL contents of alfalfa hay samples were wider than those found in our study, which was due to more number of samples in that study (İnal et al., 2020) compared with our study. Our result for mean crude protein level of alfalfa hay samples was lower than that reported by İnal et al. (2020) while mean values for NDF and ADL contents of alfalfa hay samples in our study were similar to those found in the study conducted by İnal et al. (2020). Minimum and maximum values of NDF and ADF for alfalfa hay samples in our study were higher than the results reported by Boğa and Ayaşan (2022), who analyzed different alfalfa varieties and lines at Eastern Mediterranean Agricultural Research Institute in Adana, Türkiye. Mean values for crude protein, ether extract and ADL contents of alfalfa hay samples in our study

were similar to those found in the study conducted by Filik and Ertürk (2023), who analyzed different forage sources cultivated in different locations in the Western Mediterranean of Türkiye.

After harvesting, alfalfa is generally dried in the field. In the current study, all alfalfa hays collected from dairy farms had been dried in the field. The nutritional value of alfalfa hay is affected by different drying methods, the duration of drying phase and weather variations after harvesting (Farhang et al., 2010; Neres et al., 2010; Sengul et al., 2019). Especially, leaf loss during the drying process is associated with poorer quality for alfalfa hay in respect to nutrient content (Neres et al., 2010; İnal et al., 2020). In addition, alfalfa moisture content at the time of baling and storage duration of baled alfalfa hay affect nutritional quality by microbial activity and the subsequent generation of heat (Coblentz et al., 1996; Yuan et al., 2022). Aforementioned conditions are the one of main reasons of variations regarding chemical compositions of alfalfa hay samples taken from dairy farms in our study.

Corn silage is one of the main sources of forage used in the diets of dairy cows in many parts of the world (Khan et al., 2015; Zardin et al., 2017; Ferraretto et al., 2018) and quality corn silage is palatable forage that supplies digestible NDF, high level of starch and net energy and moisture to total mixed ration. These characteristics allow producers and nutritionists to prepare an economical and a proper total mixed ration (Leonardi et al., 2005; da Silva et al., 2015). The factors influencing nutrient composition of corn silage are field conditions, irrigation, soil structure, fertilization, plant variety, the stage of maturity at harvest, kernel processing, theoretical length of cut, cutting height, the use of silage additives, storage condition and the length of storage (Ferraretto and Shaver, 2012; Tharangani et al., 2021). According to NRC (2001), corn silage is typically composed of 25-35% starch and 40-50% NDF on a dry matter basis. Although similar results were observed for NDF level of corn silages in our study, starch contents of corn silage samples that we studied were in a wider range (9.67-36.43%) compared with NRC (2001). de Oliveira et al. (2017) reported that mean dry matter, crude ash, crude protein, NDF and starch contents of corn silage samples taken from the center of silo were 35.1%, 3.64%, 7.62%, 50.3% and 30.8%, respectively. Our result for mean crude protein level of corn silage was similar to that reported by de Oliveira et

al. (2017). Corn silages produced in warm climates tend to include higher levels of NDF and less starch in comparison to corn silages produced in temperate areas (Adesogan, 2010). Mean NDF content was greater in the study (de Oliveira et al., 2017) investigating the nutritive values of corn silages grown in Brazil compared with mean NDF level of corn silage in our study. On the other part, mean starch content of corn silage was lower in our study than the study conducted by de Oliveira et al. (2017), which may be related to a wide variety for starch level (9.67-36.43%) of corn silages in our study. While ADF levels of corn silages as minimum, maximum and mean values in our study were similar to those reported by Tharangani et al. (2021), who collected corn silage samples from bunker silos at least 10 weeks after ensiling, lignin contents of silage samples in the study conducted by Tharangani et al. (2021) were lower than those found in our study. Lower lignin levels for corn silage can be obtained by harvesting early in the grain-filling period and / or hybrids modified for lower lignin content (Khan et al., 2015; Chávez et al., 2022). In a previous study (Akdeniz, 2016), corn plant was harvested at 1/4 or 1/2 milk line maturity period and whole plant corn was ensiled for 90 days. Lignin contents (3.36 and 3.39% for 1/4 and 1/2 milk line maturity, respectively) of corn silage samples collected 90 days after ensiling in this study (Akdeniz, 2016) were lower than mean lignin level (5.31%) in our study. Our result for mean crude protein level of corn silage samples was similar to those reported by Akdeniz (2016). Mean NDF, ADF and crude ash values of corn silage samples in our study were similar to those of corn silages harvested at 1/2 milk line maturity period in the study conducted by Akdeniz (2016) but these results in our study were higher than those of silage samples harvested at 1/4 milk line maturity period (Akdeniz, 2016). Partial differences in respect to mean NDF, ADF and crude ash levels of silages between our study and the study mentioned above (Akdeniz, 2016) were due to great variations for NDF, ADF and crude ash contents of silage samples in our study.

Relative feed value (RFV) has been used for years to represent the quality of legume and grass hays and silages (Jeranyama and Garcia, 2004; Hackmann et al., 2008; Kilic, 2010; Li et al., 2022; Filik and Ertürk, 2023). RFV is estimated from NDF and ADF contents of the forage (Rohweder et al., 1978; Moore and Undersander, 2002; Ward, 2014). Therefore, since wide variations were observed in NDF and ADF contents of both alfalfa hay and corn silage samples, RFV were

also greatly variable as minimum and maximum values in our study. The RFV is an index used to rank forages relative to nutritive value of full bloom alfalfa hay including 41% ADF and 53% NDF on a dry matter basis and the RFV of full bloom alfalfa hay has a value of 100, which is considered to be a standard score (Rohweder et al., 1978; Moore and Undersander, 2002; Jeranyama and Garcia, 2004). In the current study, RFV was lower than 100 for 5 of 20 alfalfa hay samples and greater than 100 for 15 of 20 alfalfa hay samples. Alfalfa hay is the most important legume forage used as a protein source in the cattle diets (Radović et al., 2009; Blume et al., 2021). In our study, a high correlation was found between RFV and crude protein content of alfalfa hay ( $r=0.81$ ). Therefore, an idea in respect to crude protein level of alfalfa hay can be obtained by evaluating RFV, although the protein content of the forage is not included in this calculation while RFV is calculated. Consequently, RFV can be used for determining alfalfa hay quality and price.

RFV has been used as an indicator for determining quality of silages in some studies (Kilic, 2010; Kasra, 2014; Sarubbi et al; 2014; Li et al., 2022). In the study conducted by Li et al. (2022), RFV for corn silage samples was calculated between 112.76 and 148.44. Our minimum RFV was lower and our maximum RFV was higher for corn silage samples compared to values found by Li et al. (2022). Minimum and maximum RFV for corn silage samples in our study were higher than the results (74 and 121 as minimum and maximum values) reported by Kasra (2014). Corn silage is the forage used widely as an energy source in the diets of dairy cattle (Ferraretto et al., 2018; Chávez et al., 2022). This energy mainly originates from the starch in the kernel fraction (Jensen et al., 2005; Khan et al., 2015), which is considered as an important characteristic for corn silage (Khan et al., 2015; Ferraretto et al., 2018; Chávez et al., 2022). Since the correlation between RFV and starch content was found significant for corn silage ( $r=0.83$ ) in our study, RFV can be used with regard to evaluating energy level of corn silage.

Total digestible nutrients (TDN) is an indicator used for estimating energy content of individual feedstuffs and diets (NRC, 2001; Owens et al; 2010). Different equations have been used for calculating TDN of feedstuffs (Owens et al; 2010). In the current study, two and three TDN equations were evaluated for alfalfa hay (TDN<sub>nrc</sub> and TDN<sub>1</sub>) and corn silage (TDN<sub>nrc</sub>, TDN<sub>2</sub> and TDN<sub>3</sub>), respectively. TDN<sub>nrc</sub> was calcu-

lated by NRC (2001) equation. TDN1 calculation for alfalfa hay and TDN2 and TDN3 calculations for corn silage were performed according to NFTA (2014). In our study, the significant correlations were observed between RFV and all TDN equations for both alfalfa hay and corn silage. The highest correlation for alfalfa hay samples was found between RFV and TDN1 and the highest correlations for corn silage samples were observed between RFV and TDN2 and TDN3 equations, which were due to the fact that TDN1, TDN2 and TDN3 equations are calculated from ADF. Because of the significant correlations found between RFV and TDN equations, RFV may be used as an indicator for evaluating energy content of alfalfa hay and corn silage.

Due to a wide variety in nutrient compositions and energy levels of alfalfa hay (Abaş et al., 2005; İnal et al., 2020; Blume et al., 2021) and corn silage (Khan et al., 2015; Zardin et al., 2017; Tharangani et al., 2021) as the most common forages included in dairy cattle diets, the analyses of nutrient contents for alfalfa hay and corn silage used in the dairy farms are required to prepare the realistic and balanced diet formulations that meet nutrient requirements of animals. In addition, determinations of nutrient composition and RFV calculations of forages are crucial for evaluating quality and / or pricing (Jeranyama and Garcia, 2004; İnal et al., 2020). On the other part, storage conditions, the duration of storage and the physical appearance (color, integrity and molding) of forages (Coblentz et al., 1996; İnal et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2022) as well as pH value, volatile fatty acids content, ammonia

level, chop length and mechanical kernel processing for corn silage (Khan et al., 2015; Tharangani et al., 2021) should be considered regarding nutrient composition, digestibility, dry matter intake and animal health in the dairy farms.

## CONCLUSIONS

In an overall conclusion, because of a wide variety in nutrient compositions and energy level of alfalfa hays and corn silages, the analyses of nutrient contents for alfalfa hays and corn silages used in the dairy farms are required to prepare the realistic diet formulations that meet nutrient requirements. RFV calculation can be used as an indicator for evaluating quality of alfalfa hay according to our results of the correlations between RFV and TDN equations and RFV and crude protein content. In addition, RFV for corn silage can be considered with respect to the quality evaluation because of the significant correlations between RFV and TDN equations and RFV and starch content. The results obtained from our study will contribute to the database of nutrient compositions of alfalfa hay and corn silage.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is not conflict of interest with any person or institute/organization regarding this manuscript.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank the directors of dairy farms from which alfalfa hay and corn silage samples were collected.

## REFERENCES

- Abaş İ, Özpınar H, Kutay HC, Kahraman R, Eseceli H (2005). Determination of the metabolizable energy (ME) and net energy lactation (NEL) contents of some feeds in the Marmara region by in vitro gas technique. *Turk J Vet Anim Sci* 29: 751-757.
- Adesogan AT (2010). Corn silage quality in tropical climates. In: *Proceedings of 5th Symposium on Strategic Management of Pasture*, Universidade Federal de Viçosa, MG, Viçosa, Brazil: pp 311-327.
- Akdeniz B (2016). The effects of different chopping lengths and compressing pressures on corn silage quality at two stage of maturity. MSc Thesis. Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Tarım Makinaları Anabilim Dalı.
- Allen MS (1996). Relationship between forage quality and dairy cattle production. *Anim Feed Sci Technol* 59: 51-60.
- Blume L, Hoischen-Taubner S, Sundrum A (2021). Alfalfa-a regional protein source for all farm animals. *J Sustainable Organic Agric Syst* 71: 1-13.
- Boğa M, Ayaşan T (2022). Determination of nutritional value of alfalfa varieties and lines by using the in vitro method and gas production technique. *J Hellenic Vet Med Soc* 73: 3613-3620.
- Chávez IG, Romero EM, Ortega OC, Esparza JZ, Avalos JO, Jiménez LER, Ronquillo MG (2022). Corn silage, a systematic review of the quality and yield in different regions around the world. *Cienc Tecnol Agropecuaria* 23: e2547.
- Coblentz WK, Fritz JO, Bolsen KK, Cochran RC (1996). Quality changes in alfalfa hay during storage in bales. *J Dairy Sci* 79: 873-885.
- da Silva MSJ, Jobim CC, Poppi EC, Tres T, Osmari MP (2015). Production technology and quality of corn silage for feeding dairy cattle in Southern Brazil. *Rev Bras de Zootec* 44: 303-313.
- de Oliveira IL, Lima LM, Casagrande DR, Lara MAS, Bernardes TF (2017). Nutritive value of corn silage from intensive dairy farms in Brazil. *R Bras Zootec* 46: 494-501.
- Farhang A, Hosinpour A, Darvishi H, Khoshtaghaza MH, Tavakolli Hashjtjin T (2010). Accelerated drying of alfalfa (*Medicago sativa* L.) by microwave dryer. *Glob Vet* 5: 158-163.
- Fernandez I, Martin C, Champion M, Michalet-Doreau B (2004). Effect of corn hybrid and chop length of whole-plant corn silage on digestion and intake by dairy cows. *J Dairy Sci* 87: 1298-1309.
- Ferraretto LF, Shaver RD (2012). Meta-analysis: Impact of corn silage

- harvest practices on intake, digestion and milk production by dairy cows. *Prof Anim Sci* 28: 141-149.
- Ferraretto LF, Shaver RD, Luck BD (2018). Silage review: Recent advances and future Technologies for whole-plant and fractionated corn silage harvesting. *J Dairy Sci* 101: 3937-3951.
- Filik AG, Ertürk MM (2023). Evaluation of some roughages for ruminant nutrition. *J Hellenic Vet Med Soc* 74: 5379-5386.
- Guo C, Wu Y, Li S, Cao Z, Wang Y, Mao J, Shi H, Shi R, Sun X, Zheng Y, Kong F, Hao Y, Xu X (2022). Effects of different forage types on rumen fermentation, microflora, and production performance in peak-lactation dairy cows. *Fermentation* 8: 507-527.
- Güngör T, Başalan M, Aydoğan İ (2008). The determination of nutrient contents and metabolizable energy levels of some roughages produced in Kirikkale Region. *Ankara Üniv Vet Fak Derg* 55: 111-115.
- Hackmann TJ, Sampson JD, Spain JN (2008). Comparing relative feed value with degradation parameters of grass and legume forages. *J Anim Sci* 86: 2344-2356.
- İnal F, Coşkun B, Alataş MS, Kahraman O, Özbilgin A (2020). Quality classification of alfalfa hays according to protein and fiber contents. *Eurasian J Vet Sci* 36: 193-198.
- Jensen C, Weisbjerg MR, Nørgaard P, Hvelplund T (2005). Effect of maize silage maturity on site of starch and NDF digestion in lactating dairy cows. *Anim Feed Sci Technol* 118: 279-294.
- Jeranyama P, Garcia AD (2004). Understanding relative feed value (RFV) and relative forage quality (RFQ). [https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1351&context=extension\\_extra](https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1351&context=extension_extra) [accessed August 2004].
- Kahyani A, Ghorbani GR, Alikhani M, Ghasemi E, Sadeghi-Sefidmazi A, Beauchemin KA, Nasrollahi SM (2019). Performance of dairy cows fed diets with similar proportions of undigested neutral detergent fiber with wheat straw substituted for alfalfa hay, corn silage, or both. *J Dairy Sci* 102: 10903-10915.
- Kasra AAA (2014). The physical and fermentation properties of various silages produced in commercial farms from different provinces of Kahramanmaraş. MSc Thesis. Department of Animal Science, Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences, Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University.
- Khan NA, Yu P, Ali M, Cone JW, Hendriksa WH (2015). Nutritive value of maize silage in relation to dairy cow performance and milk quality. *J Sci Food Agric* 95: 238-252.
- Kilic U (2010). Nutritive values of whole-crop wheat hay and silage and effect of microbial inoculants on in vitro gas production. *J Appl Anim Res* 37: 67-71.
- Leonardi, C, Giannico F, Armentano LE (2005). Effect of water addition on selective consumption (sorting) of dry diets by dairy cattle. *J Dairy Sci* 88: 1043-1049.
- Licitra G, Hernandez TM, Van Soest PJ (1996). Standardization of procedures for nitrogen fractionation of ruminant feeds. *Anim Feed Sci Technol* 57: 347-358.
- Li X, Brummer EC (2012). Applied genetics and genomics in alfalfa breeding. *Agronomy* 2: 40-61.
- Linn J, Mahanna B, Waghorn G (2014). Forage management. In: J Tricarico (Ed), *Considerations and Resources on Feed and Animal Management*. Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, Rosemont, IL: pp 18-29.
- Li J, Wen X, Yang J, Yang W, Xin Y, Zhang L, Liu H, He Y, Yan Y (2022). Effects of maize varieties on biomass yield and silage quality of maize-soybean intercropping in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. *Fermentation* 8: 542-553.
- Mirzaei-Aghsaghali A, Maheri-Sis N, Mirza-Aghazadeh A, Safaei AR, Aghajanzadeh-Golshani A (2008). Nutritional value of alfalfa varieties for ruminants with emphasis on different measuring methods: A review. *Res J Biol Sci* 3: 1227-1241.
- Moore JE, Undersander DJ (2002). Relative forage quality: An alternative to relative feed value and quality index. In: *Proceedings of 13th Annual Florida Ruminant Nutrition Symposium*, University of Florida, Gainesville, USA: pp 16-32.
- National Forage Testing Association (NFTA) (2014). Forage analyses procedures. Estimates of energy availability, Appendix A3. <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/forage/files/2014/01/NFTA-Forage-Analysis-Procedures.pdf> [accessed 2014].
- National Research Council (NRC) (2001). Nutrient requirements of dairy cattle. 7th revised ed., National Academy of Science. Washington, DC.
- Neres MA, Castagnara DD, Mesquita EE, Zambom MA, de Souza LC, de Oliveira PSR, Jobim CC (2010). Production of alfalfa hay under different drying methods. *R. Bras. Zootec* 39: 1676-1683.
- Owens FN, Sapienza DA, Hassen AT (2010). Effect of nutrient composition of feeds on digestibility of organic matter by cattle: A review. *J Anim Sci* 88: E151-E169.
- Özkan U (2024). Observance of agronomic and nutritive profile of some silage corn hybrids in central Anatolian region of Turkey. *JOTAF* 21: 393-403.
- Radović J, Sokolović D, Marković J (2009). Alfalfa-most important perennial forage legume in animal husbandry. *Biotechnol Anim Husb* 25: 465-475.
- Ranjbar GA (2007). Forage and hay yield performance of different berseem clover (*Trifolium alexandrinum* L.) genotypes in Mazandaran conditions. *Asian J Plant Sci* 6: 1006-1011.
- Rohweder DA, Barnes RF, Jorgeson N (1978). Proposed hay grading standards based on laboratory analyses for evaluating quality. *J Anim Sci* 47: 747-759.
- Sarubbi F, Chiariotti A, Baculo R, Contò G, Huws SA (2014). Nutritive value of maize and sorghum silages: fibre fraction degradation and rumen microbial density in buffalo cows. *Czech J Anim Sci* 59: 278-287.
- Sengul AY, Kokten K, Das A, Kaplan M, Cacan E, Yilmaz HS (2019). The effects of various drying methods on the nutrient composition of alfalfa varieties. *Fresenius Environ Bull* 28: 6618-6625.
- SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) (2021). SPSS v28.0 Statistical Software, IBM Corp, CA, USA.
- Tharangani RMH, Yakun C, Zhao LS, Ma L, Liu HL, Su SL, Shan L, Yang ZN, Kononoff PJ, Weiss WP, Bu DP (2021). Corn silage quality index: An index combining milk yield, silage nutritional and fermentation parameters. *Anim Feed Sci Technol* 273: 114817.
- The Association of Official Analytical Chemists (AOAC) (2003). Official Methods of Analysis. 17<sup>th</sup> ed., Association of Official Analytical Chemists, Maryland. Method 954.01, 920.39, 920.40 and 942.05.
- Ünalp E (2014). Different forms of alfalfa hay in the vegetation period determination of nutrient content. MSc Thesis. Namık Kemal Üniversitesi, Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Zootekni Anabilim Dalı.
- Van Soest PJ, Robertson JB, Lewis BA (1991). Methods for dietary fiber, neutral detergent fiber, and nonstarch polysaccharides in relation to animal nutrition. *J Dairy Sci* 74: 3583-3597.
- Wang E, Cha M, Wang S, Wang Q, Wang Y, Li S, Wang W (2023). Feeding corn silage or grass hay as sole dietary forage sources: overall mechanism of forages regulating health-promoting fatty acid status in milk of dairy cows. *Foods* 12: 303-322.
- Ward R (2014). Relative feed value (RFV) vs. relative forage quality (RFQ). [http://www.foragelab.com/Media/RFV\\_vs\\_RFQ-CVAS%20Perspective.pdf](http://www.foragelab.com/Media/RFV_vs_RFQ-CVAS%20Perspective.pdf) [accessed February 14, 2008].
- Yuan N, Sun L, Du S, Ge G, Wang Z, Li Y, Bao J, Zhao M, Si Q, Hao J, Jia Y (2022). Effects of harvesting period and storage duration on volatile organic compounds and nutritive qualities of alfalfa. *Agriculture* 12: 1115-1132.
- Zardin PB, Velho JP, Jobim CC, Alessio, DRM, Haygert-Velho IMP, da Conceição GM, Almeida PSG (2017). Chemical composition of corn silage produced by scientific studies in Brazil-A meta-analysis. *Semina: Ciênc Agrár* 38: 503-512.
- Zhang X, Liu Y, Kong F, Wang W, Li S (2023). Comparison of nutritional components, ruminal degradation characteristics and feed value from different cultivars of alfalfa hay. *Animals* 13: 734-745.