



## Tips for harvesting lodged maize

March 2026

### Grain

- Consider harvesting earlier. Tackling lodged paddocks early will limit mould and quality loss from ears on or near the soil.
- If cobs are 200mm+ above ground the likelihood of saving the crop improves.
- Harvest any standing maize when the conditions are tough in the downed maize.
- Harvest with the lean from the base of the plant moving towards top.
  - Grower experience suggests harvesting from the base of the lodged crop, with the heads leaning slightly away from the harvester front at about an angle of around 11 o'clock or 1 o'clock.
- If it is hard to see the maize head and to stay on the rows, consider running the outside row over a harvested row. For example, harvest 5 rows at a time with a 6-row header. Add coloured snout tips to help see them in the stalks.
- Expect to slow right down (about 3.2 km/h / 2 mph in bad areas). Going slower usually saves more ears.

### Front setup (crop down)

**Header angle:** flatter for crop laid across the rows; a touch steeper helps when lodged with the rows.

**Gathering chains:** set lugs opposed (not staggered). Reverse the chains if you need more "bite".

**Corn/maize reel:** A reel won't always cut losses, but it may allow you to travel faster and get more done when time is tight.

### Combine Settings

**Cleaning:** with lighter, stop-go flow, back the fan off enough to avoid blowing kernels out.

**Threshing:** ease rotor/cylinder speed to protect kernels; tweak in small steps and re-check.

**Feed rhythm:** match gathering-chain speed to ground speed so you're not pushing or dragging stalks.

### Silaging lodged maize

#### Key points

- Timing & DM: Target 30–38% DM whole plant; use milk line only as a trigger, re-sample often in lodged fields.
- Header & travel: Work with the lay, go slow, lift plants without scraping soil; reels and spiral end cones can help feed severe down crop.

- Cut height: Raise where dirty/flooded—expect better starch/NDFd but a small DM yield penalty.
- Chopper settings:
  - TLOC: 10–15 mm at 32–38% DM; 15–20 mm if wet (<30% DM); 5–9 mm if dry (>40% DM).
  - Kernel processing: >95% cracked; 1–3 mm roller gap; field bucket wash or KPS to verify.
- Ash/soil control: Keep dirt away from knives; consider 75–100 mm cut on dirty ground; keep pack tractors/loaders clean to avoid tracking mud into the stack.
- Packing & covering: Thin layers ( $\leq$  ~150 mm), cover immediately (oxygen barrier + plastic), seal and weight fully; DairyNZ density tables help size stacks.
- Mycotoxins: Prioritise lodged/diseased paddocks; test silage (e.g., DON) if ear rots present; manage rations accordingly.
- Safety: Lock out/Safe Stop before unplugging (neutral, engine off, key out, guards on); set clear signals between chopper, carts, packer.

### **Need help?**

Contact Rural Support Trust, 0800 787 254 (8 am–6 pm incl. public holidays) and 1737 (free call/text 24/7).

### **Acknowledgements and references**

This information has been drawn from a number of sources (see links below). Thanks also to John Austin, John Austin Ltd, for his comments.

[Corson Maize](#)

[Pioneer NZ](#)

[Pioneer US](#)

[University of Nebraska](#)

[Iowa State University](#)

[No-Till Farmer](#)