



SILAGE DECISIONS FACTSHEET



CUTTING DATE

Cutting date is a key decision because of its impact on silage yield and quality. But as the crop starts to bulk up and yield increases quality will start to decline because the crop is starting to produce stems and heads which are lower in digestibility than leafy growth.

The objective should be to match the silage land area available to the quality and quantity of silage needed for winter feeding. Cuts should then be made to optimise quality.

As a rule, digestibility, measured in D-value, falls by 0.5 D-value a day from when grass starts to bulk up. But this will be influenced by the species of grass, the heading date of grasses in the mixture, local climate and clover content of the sward - as clover digestibility reduces more slowly than grass.

Factors to consider when deciding on a cutting date

- How much will be required to feed stock over the feeding period (see below)
- Heading date of the species and varieties in the sward
- What quality of forage is needed for its intended use (e.g. sucklers or finishing cattle)
- An earlier cut of higher quality may allow reduced concentrate use
- When nitrogen or slurry was applied, as a high nitrate content in grass at cutting leads to poor fermentation.
- The choice of grass mixture should reflect anticipated cutting date (i.e. early maturing varieties are not ideal when silage cannot be cut until June)

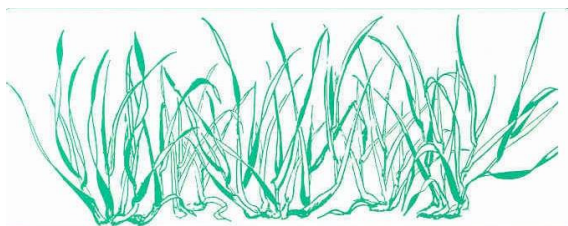
How much silage is needed?

Class of stock	Daily dry matter intake (kg)*	Monthly silage requirement/animal
Dry suckler cow of 550kg	7.4 to 10kg	220 to 300kg dry matter (or 880kg to 1.2t at 25% dry matter)
Lactating suckler cow of 550kg	8.8kg to 11.6kg	264 to 348kg dry matter
Beef animal at 400kg	5.6 to 8kg	168 to 240kg dry matter
Store at 200kg	3.5 to 4.8kg	105 to 144kg dry matter
Calf at 100kg	1.9 to 2.6kg	57 to 78kg dry matter
Ewe	0.8kg to 1.1kg	24-33kg dry matter

Source: Intake data based on information from Rationing Beef Cattle, D Allen and SAC advice.

* Factors influencing intakes include: animal weight, dry matter %, energy level, fermentation quality, silage chop length, trough space, ad-lib or restricted feeding and level of straw or concentrate fed.

How would the crop look at different D-values?



- 72 D-value, leafy growth
- Estimated first cut date in south west England - May 10
- Typical first cut yield of a long term ley - 4.6t/ha

- 68 D-value, lengthening of stems
- Estimated first cut date in south west England - May 20
- Typical yield first cut of a long term ley - 6.1t/ha



- 65 D-value, flower heads emerged
- Estimated first cut date in south west England - May 30
- Typical first cut yield of a long term ley - 7.5t/ha

Timing second cuts of silage

The time between first and second cut will have most impact on second cut quality, but this will depend on other factors, including maturity class of species and varieties in the sward, clover content and nitrogen applications.

D-value post first cut:

Days after first cut	Estimated grass quality
35 days	72 D-value
45 days	68 D-value
55 days	65 D-value

Further information: Rationing Beef Cattle, Second Edition, Dr David Allen (1992).

Factsheet produced by Jessica Buss, BGS; George Fisher; Alan Hopkins, GES Consulting.

Please note: Any changes to management should be researched thoroughly and tried cautiously. BGS and EBLEX cannot be held liable for any losses.