



## SILAGE DECISIONS FACTSHEET



# LAST GRAZING

First cut silage yield will be reduced where grazing late into spring is practiced or when the field is poached through spring or winter grazing.

The later you graze the greater the impact on yield. However, higher yields can be obtained by cutting later, but crop quality will be reduced due to a higher proportion of reproductive tillers in the crop.

It is easy to overgraze fields in spring and this will reduce their recovery rate, the subsequent yield of silage and delay cutting date. Although by grazing in spring and accepting a lower yield by cutting before the crop has fully bulked, silage quality can be higher.

But if grazing animals are taken off a sward in autumn and there is a large sturdy crop over winter you can get a build up of trash and this can reduce silage yield too.

The leaves you see in December will not be the ones you cut for silage, as grass only has three live leaves on a tiller and as a new leaf grows - every 101 to 33 days - one leaf will die (see How Grass Grows Factsheet).

Therefore, where grass is available and field conditions are suitable, grazing into November or even December will be good for swards and reduce winter feeding and bedding costs, without reducing silage yield in the next year.

However, severe poaching by grazing fields in wet conditions is not advisable, as it can take swards a year to recover and it will reduce silage yields.

Estimates of effects on silage yield and quality:

Last grazing	Silage yield reduction	Impact on quality
March 1	0	0
March 15	-0.3t/ha	-5%
March 28	-0.65t/ha	-10%
April 10	-1.3t/ha	-21%

**Further information:** Milk From Grass, Second Edition, (1991) Thomas C., Reeve a., Fisher GEJ., published by BGS.

AS Laidlaw and CS Mayne Setting management limits for the production and utilization of herbage for out-of-season grazing; Grass and Forage Science, Volume 55, pp14-25 (2000).

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*Please note: Any changes to farm management should be researched thoroughly and tried cautiously, such as on a small area, bearing in mind any restrictions in force, such as Nitrate Vulnerable Zone regulations or Environmental Stewardship scheme rules. BGS and EBLEX cannot be held liable for any losses.*