



SILAGE DECISIONS FACTSHEET



TIPS ON IMPROVING SILAGE QUALITY

One of the biggest choices to be made when making silage is what quality is required. If you have dry suckler cows in good condition to feed over the winter, then average or low quality silage is ideal. Feeding such cows a high quality silage could see them gain too much condition or complicate rationing because intakes would need to be restricted.

But if you want to finish beef on a low concentrate ration, then your concentrate bill can be reduced most by making very good quality silage.

The compromise when making silage is that to increase quality will often mean a lower silage yield. An early cutting date, at 70-72 D-value, is a key factor in making a high quality silage, but this will mean accepting a lower crop yield.

Factors which can increase silage quality

Decision	Impact	Other considerations
Reseeding	Moderate	New varieties and short term leys better than old varieties and weed grasses
Clover	Moderate	Higher in second cut Increases protein % Helps protect crop D-value for longer
Too much manure or nitrogen	Moderate	Too little reduces yield
P and K fertiliser	Low, particularly in the short term	Soil reserves make this a long term issue
Sulphur fertiliser	Low	Can replace some N fertiliser
Weeds	Moderate	Lower D-value than grass
Cutting date	High	But a compromise on yield is necessary
Silage additives	Low	Products may vary. Select carefully according to circumstances
Chop length	Low	Very short reduced fibre for rumination Too long makes consolidation difficult and can reduce fermentation efficiency
Silage wrap	Low-moderate	Six layers of wrap can ensure a high quality silage
Clamping	Low-moderate	Two sheets will help seal the clamp and reduce waste, though will have a limited impact on quality below a wasted layer

*See the relevant factsheets in this series for further information on all of the above.

Factsheet produced by Jessica Buss, BGS.

Please note: Any changes to management should be researched thoroughly and tried cautiously, bearing in mind any restrictions in force, such as environmental stewardship scheme rules. BGS and EBLEX cannot be held liable for any losses.