

# Technical Update – Forage

Information correct as at 09:00am on 17.04.2020

- Rising feed prices make top quality forage even more important
- Attention to detail at every stage is the key to good silage
- Beware of potential issues caused by late slurry applications and ground damage
- Soils are warming so maize drilling can commence soon

## 1st Cut silage

Across the country farmers are already taking the opportunity provided by the dry, sunny weather to start cutting silage. This year could potentially pose some extra problems caused by the wet winter and resulting late applications of slurry under poor conditions, which could increase the risk of contamination in the crop.

## Why Multicut?

The system allows the farm to grow more forage of better quality. It often requires a change of mind set; looking at the clamp in terms of total MJ of energy and kg of protein as opposed to just tonnage.

Higher quality silage contains lower fibre levels and this allows increased forage inclusion rates in diets. With this system all cuts should be of similar quality and quantity as grass is cut at shorter intervals. The system uses the same principles as rotational grazing in terms of allowing grass time to recover between defoliations whilst utilising as much growth as possible before leaves die back.

The system reduces risk in 3 ways.

- Higher forage: concentrate ratios reduce the risk of rumen upsets
- More milk from forage reduces the farm's exposure to volatile feed markets
- Smaller cuts can be made more quickly meaning you can take advantage of shorter weather windows

## When?

Aim to take 1<sup>st</sup> cut in weather windows at the end of April or early May. Slurry and fertiliser applications should have been planned accordingly to ensure all nutrients are taken up. Subsequent cuts should be targeted at 30-35 day intervals, but be prepared to go earlier if the weather is suitable.

## Mowing:

Cutting height should be targeted at 6-7 cm to encourage residual photosynthetic rates, which are a key part of this system, especially in new leys. If there is residual slurry in the base of the sward raise the cutting height further.

## Tedding:

Tedding should be carried out according to the weather conditions and weight of crop. The aim should be to get dry matters to 32-35% within 24 hours. Some crops may need tedding more than once at this time of year. Setting up tedders and rowers is again more crucial than ever to avoid potential contamination.

## **Chop length and Clamping:**

Chop length should be varied according to dry matter, with higher dry matter crops needing a shorter chop to get good consolidation. Target chop lengths of <25mm if dry matters are optimum (if you are compact feeding and have excellent clamp management then you can go even shorter). If dry matter drops below 30% increase chop length incrementally, even out to 50mm+ in wet conditions. To avoid slippage, fill the clamps in thin layers as opposed to a wedge. Aim for a density of 250kg/m<sup>3</sup>, it will probably require another tractor on the clamp to achieve this.

Get sheets on quickly and weigh down well, using a good quality film sheet on top of the grass and under the top sheet will reduce wastage.

## **Additives**

These will not make poor silage good and are no substitute for attention to detail but can be cost effective and are worth considering. There are different products available for specific circumstances. Your consultant will be able to advise you on the right product for your conditions.

## **Nutrients for the next cut:**

Fertiliser and slurry should be applied as soon as possible after the forager leaves the field. Using sulphur in the After-Cut fertiliser will be beneficial to subsequent crop quantity and quality.

## **Maize Drilling:**

Following on from last week's note we are seeing soil temperatures rising across the country. With the forecast for higher temperatures over the weekend conditions are improving and drilling maize can start if your soils are warm enough.

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For further discussion or to help with any questions that you may have, please contact Consultant Support on [consultantsupport@kiteconsulting.com](mailto:consultantsupport@kiteconsulting.com) or 01902 851007 / 07542 403225