

Making best silage: Pre season preparation



In the run-up to the balewrapping season farmers and agricultural contractors should ensure that they are as well-prepared as possible in order to avoid problems and delays later on.



Farmers and contractors everywhere should take time to check that they are as well-prepared as possible for the baled silage season.

As such it is worth considering if machinery needs to be cleaned and if any vital parts are suffering from wear and tear. These and many other questions can be resolved with an straightforward programme of preparation to help balewrapping activities run smoothly and efficiently.

The balewrapping process is structured and relatively simple but it can be made

considerably more costly and time consuming if users ignore the various preparatory steps that should be taken prior to the silage season.

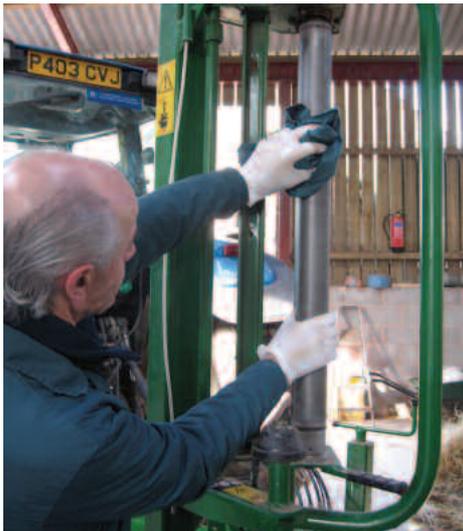
Balewrapping machinery is no different from any other kind of machinery – a long period without use can encourage decay and increase the risk of important parts failing once the machinery is back in use. Farmers and contractors have it within their power to prevent such problems, both before and during the season.

The recommended seven pre-season checkpoints are:

1. Ensure all moving parts are free-moving - pay particular attention to the Pre Stretch Unit (PSU), which can stiffen or seize up during periods of non-use.
2. Check all belts for wear and tear and replace all belts, even if only one is damaged or worn. Badly aligned and worn belts will affect film overlap.
3. Check PSU and turntable gearing for wear and tear.
4. Check PSU rollers for any damage and thoroughly clean down with de-greaser.
5. Check PSU springs and replace if necessary (weak springs, dirty or worn-out rollers will cause aquaplaning, film-tearing and uneven film application).
6. Check for film overlap and correct stretch by wrapping a straw bale before the wrapping season starts.
 - (i) Align centre of film reel with centre of bale to achieve 50% overlap;
 - (ii) Measure film neck down on flat end of bale (750mm should be between 580mm -610mm on bale, 500mm should be between 380mm - 410mm);
 - (iii) Measure correct percentage stretch by placing two vertical marks 10cm apart on the roll of film and then measuring the distance apart once on the bale. For 55% stretch it should measure 15.5cm and 17cm for 70% stretch;

Cont.

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(iv) Calibrate the correct number of turns to apply the minimum amount of film by counting the number of turns to completely cover the bale. Then add one turn and double this number of turns for a minimum of four layers. For all bales of 50% DM and above, add the one turn and then triple the total for 6 layers.

7. Ensure your equipment is maintained and serviced regularly in line with the manufacturer's guidelines.

Note: Bale sizes vary in both size and shape - extra turns may be necessary to achieve correct film application.

If the above checks are carried out bale-wrapping should run smoothly. It is however important to continue the good work through the season to prevent any problems.

Four in-season checks:

- 1 Regularly clean down PSU Rollers with a de-greaser or white spirit.
- 2 Regularly check for correct overlap of film and correct stretch and neck down.
- 3 Routinely check the number of turns required to achieve correct film application -especially if different balers are being used - as sizes can and do vary and in many cases not enough turns are being applied.
- 4 Follow the film manufacturer's instructions.

