

Making best silage: Making the most of late season big bale silage



The unpredictable weather in the United Kingdom over the last few summers resulted in a silage shortage on up to a third of livestock farms there. The shortfall between the silage made and the silage needed can prove costly when farmers are forced to replace silage with other feed stocks. Making the most of late summer/early autumn silage is one way of combating this shortage. It also helps sward management by removing surplus grass and decreases the chance of lesser yields in the subsequent season by reducing the growth of yeast and moulds. The following advice regarding big bale late season silage was put together by minster films for its UK customer base,



The first thing you should do is a forage budget for your farm:

- Calculate how much silage you need for the winter.
- Tot up what you've made so far.
- Deduct what you've made so far from the total you will need for the winter. If you have a shortfall by the end of June or early July, you can top up your big bale silage stocks with late season silage.
- Find out the quality of the silage you've already made by getting it analysed.
- Calculate how much you need to make up the shortfall.
- Follow the 10 top tips for making the most of late season big bale silage.

10 top tips for making the most of late season big bale silage

- 1 Spread bagged fertiliser or slurry onto the grass intended for bale silage during August, September and possibly even October. Allow at least 1 day for every 2 units/acre of nitrogen applied between applying fertilizer and harvesting the grass.
- 2 Cut at around 6 weeks of re-growth for an 11.5 ME silage. If a high ME value isn't so important, then the period can be lengthened to 8 weeks of re-growth for an ME of around 10.5.
- 3 Aim to cut and wilt the grass in the dry as this helps to concentrate the sugar level in the grass which tends to be lower in sugar than first or second cut due to a reduction in sunlight as the days draw in.
- 4 The use of a proven silage additive to promote a rapid conservation is advisable when baling late season silage. The additive helps to overcome the challenges of late cut grass such as lower dry matter, lower sugar concentration and increased risk of undesirable bacteria and fungi.
- 5 Whether early or late cut silage, bales should always be stored a minimum 10m away from a watercourse.
- 6 To ensure better preservation of late cut silage, which tends to be lower in DM than first cut silage, it is recommended that you use 6 layers of wrap. Experiments conducted at IBERS have shown that additional layers of wrap help to reduce the losses of effluent.
- 7 Choose a strategic storage site and ensure it is well prepared as the ground may be wetter later in the season.
- 8 Low dry matter bales shouldn't be stacked. They should be stored in a single layer to prevent the heavier bales putting too much pressure on the bales underneath and 'blowing' the balewrap seal causing oxygen ingress and silage quality problems.
- 9 Late season silage tends to have lower energy and protein levels than first cut silage. You should analyse your silage in order to plan a stock feeding regime to ensure that you are maximising your silage stocks when it comes to feeding out.
- 10 As with all bale stacks, you should net your late season silage to protect it from birds and vermin.

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