

# Making best silage: Protecting your baled silage from wireworms

The correct storage of silage bales is vital to preserve and retain the quality and nutritional value of the feed inside. Handling and storing bales properly avoids damage caused by birds and rodents or even grass stubble. However, there is another potential hazard to baled silage, which has until now been overlooked, and that is the damage which can be caused by wireworms.



Wireworms are the larvae of click beetles and are usually found in permanent pasture. Damage caused by them has traditionally been associated with crops following long-term grassland. In recent years, wireworm damage has become an increasing problem for potato growers in the UK. As soil dwellers, they bite through roots and stems at ground level and any baled silage stored on the ground could be at risk of attack.

Visible wireworm damage takes the form of 4mm diameter holes created by the worms as they enter the bale. If farmers wish to store bales on grassland, it is possible to do so as long as the bales are kept at least 10 metres away from any water, including field drains and ditches into which silage effluent could enter. However, storing bales on grassland could lead to plastic film wrap which is in direct contact with the soil being damaged by burrowing wireworms.

In 2007, Dow Europe GmbH, manufacturer of DOWLEX™ Polyethylene Resins designed for bale wrapping films, and minster films, manufacturers of Silotite, both independently commissioned baled silage trials at the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER). The test bales from both of these trials were stored on

grass at the IGER farm. Upon inspection during the autumn, Rhun Fychan, IGER Silage Researcher, found the bales to be damaged when they were opened. Up to 10% of the silage surface was found to be mouldy and at first it was thought that the holes in the silage film were due to mechanical damage by the rollers of the bale handler. However, a closer inspection identified that the holes had been caused by wireworms.

Norbert Schulze, Silage Marketing Manager at Dow Europe GmbH, pointed out that: "Although no case of damage to baled silage stacks by wireworms had been previously reported and that this was perhaps a rare occurrence, farmers need to be aware of the possibility of this type of damage when choosing their silage storage area."

Following the discovery, the damage was assessed by Peter Dennis, an ecologist at Aberystwyth University. Mr. Dennis is in no doubt that the damage was caused by wireworms as it is similar to damage observed previously on sugar beet.

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