

## Making better silage

Grassland consultant, Chris Duller, and animal nutritionist, Kate Phillips, welcomed a group of farmers to Paul Westaway's Gloucestershire farm to find out more about making better silage. The group discussed what better silage actually means before heading off over the fields to look at different crops.



### Better silage actually means:

**Better nutritional quality** – it is important to match the quality to the needs of the stock, whether that is the energy, protein, fibre or sugars in the silage.

**Better fermentation** – the crop must ferment properly in order to be palatable, of good nutritional quality and store well.

**Better efficiency** – making silage in an efficient and consistent way will keep costs down.

It was suggested that the best way to start is by having some clear targets about what you want to achieve and discuss them with the contractor to ensure everyone is working towards them. The next step is calculating out how much silage will be needed for the following year, an important point when considering this is wastage.

Both Chris and Kate highlighted the importance of attention to detail at all stages – in field, harvesting, ensiling and feeding.

Soil testing ahead of doing anything else will provide you with the key information to get the growing conditions right. The structure of the soil will affect the amount of crop grown and the heading date; grass that is stressed will head early.

Seed choice is also important and heading dates should be similar for all the varieties in the mix.



Once at the point of harvest, the chop length should be determined by how wet the crop is; the drier the crop the shorter it should be chopped. The moisture content will determine the intake – very wet silage is hard for stock to eat so it's more of a challenge for them to meet their needs.

When forage is wet, fermentation is also more of a risk. The use of an additive will ensure it will ferment properly and it is a relatively small cost in terms of the full cost of production. There has been a lot of research carried out to prove whether the use of an additive makes high quality silage. If conditions aren't ideal, additives won't make fantastic

silage, but it will make palatable silage. Kate advised to make sure the additive is proven; the number of bugs per gram should be around 1 million.

Poor fermentation will result in an acidic pH. And anything acidic (around pH 3.5) will mean that intake is poor because the rumen has to buffer the acid.

Remember that **poor silage is counter-productive for most stock** and often sheep won't even touch it. If you lose 1MJ/kg DM in silage quality you can end up feeding up to 10 kg more (Per animal) in concentrates.

For more information on growing better silage download the BRP manual  
[Making grass silage for Better Returns](#)