

## Making good-quality silage

Andrew Crow of Cherrington Manor, Shropshire, has developed a farming system which is based on cattle utilising good-quality grass and forage.

Focusing on improved silage production has allowed Andrew to achieve a significant reduction in concentrate use and the cost of production of his suckler herd while maintaining performance.

Andrew has consistently made clamp silage at 30% dry matter (DM) and big bale silage at 50-60% DM, with a metabolisable energy (ME) content of above 11 MJ/kg DM.

This has been achieved by getting the basics right which has involved using some of the best grasses and clovers on the Recommended Grass and Clover Lists in his 3-4 year grass leys. These varieties have higher digestibility values and similar heading dates. Andrew then ensured the lime, phosphate and potash indices are correct on those fields to allow him to maximise silage yields.

He spreads around 20 tonnes/ha of farmyard manure in the autumn to replace phosphate and potash and then a further 250kg/ha of nitrogen (CAN 46%) is applied during late April. Andrew then aims to cut the silage six weeks later, with harvesting taking place in mid-June, just before the seed heads start to emerge. This ensures the digestibility of the silage is good and the grass plants have not created too much stalk (fibre). Andrew also mows the crop in the afternoon to ensure the grass will contain a higher percentage of sugars which will aid fermentation and allow more sugars to be left in the silage for the animals to digest.

Andrew aims for a rapid wilt, with all the grass being tedded immediately after cutting. The clamp silage will then be harvested 24 hours later, with the round bale silage harvested 48 hours later.

Andrew has admitted that everything doesn't always go to plan as the weather can influence the quality. Last year the weather became wet in mid-June and the silage was not cut at the right time.



This year, the dry weather in April and May caused stress to the grass which has headed nearly three weeks early. This has meant that to achieve quality, Andrew has had to cut earlier, sacrificing some yield.

At Cherrington Manor, some of the poorer-quality silage can be utilised by the suckler cows which often need to lose condition before calving, while the quality silage can be fed to the growing and finishing cattle on the out-wintering system.

Producing quality silage has been key to achieving growth rates of more than 0.6kg a day while out-wintering youngstock without the use of concentrates. If the silage was poor quality, the cattle would need either supplementation to achieve the growth rate desired or a longer finishing period, which could then reduce

stocking rates across the farm.

Further information can be found in the BRP manual [Making Grass Silage for Better Returns](#).  
A copy of the [Recommended Grass and Clover Lists](#) can also be found online .