**10 Key Steps to Successful Silage**



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| **P**  **L**  **A**  **N**  **N**  **I**  **N**  **G** | **1. Why conserve forage?**  • What are your business goals?  • Does silagefit into the whole farm plan by meeting the production and management goals?  • Is silage the most economic and/or practical option to fill a feed gap, to balance the ration or utilise excess  pasture? |
| **2. Always target high quality silage; it:**  • Maximises animal production potential.  • Reduces production, storage and feedout costs per unit of stored ME (metabolisable energy).  • Increases management flexibility. |
| **3. Minimise costs**  • Are your harvesting, storage and feedout systems well matched to maximise efficiency and minimise  costs?  • Should you invest capital in silage equipment? Should you consider using a contractor?  • Will capital investment increase efficiency, and therefore increase profitability? |
| **M**  **A**  **K**  **I**  **N**  **G** | **4. Start with high quality forage**   • Grow crops and pastures that produce high quality forage and have high yield potential. |
| **5. Cut at the recommended growth stage**  • Forage quality declines as the crop or pasture matures. Time of harvest is important.  • Consider the effect on regrowth of pastures and forage crops.  • Maximise pasture utilisation by integratingsilage cuts with grazing. |
| **6. Wilt as quickly as possible to target dry matter (ideally within 24 hours, but less than 48)**  • Leave the swath as wide as possible;  • Use a mower conditioner;  • Use a tedder to spread the windrow.  • Don’t over-wilt – field losses increase and silage is harder to compact. |
| **7. Minimise losses (of quality and quantity) during harvest and storage**  • Harvest at the target dry matter level.  • Certain additives will improve silage fermentation if wilting conditions are poor.  • Even when good silage preservation is expected, inoculants can improve silage quality and animal  production.  • Additives will not compensate for poor silage management (late harvest, slow wilting or poor sealing).  **Chopped silage**  • Roll pits/stacks/bunkers throughout the harvest process to eliminate air.  • Finer chop will be easier to compact.  • Seal pits or stacks as soon as harvest is complete, ideally within 3 days of starting large pits or stacks.  **Baled silage**  • Aim for high density bales to minimise air pockets.  • Wrap or seal bales **as soon as possible** after baling.  • Minimise damage to stretchwrap by wrapping at the storage site or use specialist equipment to transport  bales to storage. |
| **F**  **E**  **E**  **D**  **I**  **N**  **G** | **8. Ensure feedout system will support high intake**  • Ease of removing and eating the silage (accessibility) affects intake  • The feeding space allocated per animal and access time will affect intake. |
| **9. Minimise losses during feedout**  • Good feeding facilities will reduce losses.  • Control access during feeding to eliminate trampling and fouling.  • Feed regularly and only in quantities that will be consumed between feeds.  • Keep feedout areas clean to prevent contamination of fresh batches.  • High feed quality will reduce wastage. |
| **E**  **V**  **A**  **L**  **U**  **A**  **T**  **E** | **10. Evaluate the whole silage system – how can it be made more profitable?**  • Keep records of field operations – were all operations done at the right time? What could have been  improved?  • Keep records of what crops/pasture are stored.  • Use feed tests to monitor silage quality? Is it acceptable? Given the parent forage, should it be better?  • Use feed tests to monitor animal production.  • Monitor storage losses. Can you explain why you are getting losses in storage?  • Estimate feedout losses. How can they be reduced?  • Monitor silage costs. Are there opportunities for reducing costs? |