



Following the wet conditions of March it is paramount that a good plan is put in place for this year's silage crop. Successful silage is a highly digestible and well preserved grass crop. There are crucial steps to be carried out and management of these steps will determine the success of your silage.



1. Soil Fertility

"If it is rarely measured it is rarely fixed"

Soil analysis is paramount when making decisions on fertiliser application for silage crops. 90% of all soil tested in Ireland have shown a deficiency in either P, K or pH. Just over 50% of P is available to grass production with a soil pH of 6. Therefore, applying lime in the autumn is important to correct pH.



2. Spring Sward Management

"A 10% dock infestation means you have one full bale of docks in every 10"

The recommendation to graze silage ground tightly in March to remove the **"dead butt"**, may not apply in all cases this year. What is now more important for many swards is to try and achieve an early cut to maximise Dry Matter Digestibility (DMD). If you intend cutting silage in mid-May, it could be too late to apply slurry, particularly if there is a good covering of grass left to graze. Where swards have been grazed in wet conditions, rolling is important to minimise soil contamination, particularly for silage ground. April is also the month to get on top of weeds.



3. Spring Fertiliser

"Pick a date and have a plan, 2 units of N per day from spreading to harvest"

Poor soil fertility and low sulphur levels limit the plants ability to utilise Nitrogen (N) for protein production. The rule of thumb is that 2 units of N are used by the crop per day prior to harvesting. Therefore, work backwards from your intended harvesting date to calculate the amount of N required on the date of application. Remember some N is still available from slurry and earlier applications of fertiliser - factor this into your N requirement. Avoid applying lime on silage ground in the spring.



4. Harvesting Date

"Harvest in mid-May to maximise on digestibility and yield"

The harvest date is a key step in ensuring farmers achieve highly digestible silage. Table 1. shows the effect on silage digestibility, when the harvest date is delayed. A 65 DMD silage means that only 65% of the silage which is eaten is digested, in other words 35% of your silage is not available for milk or meat production. Silage must be harvested with enough sugars to ensure good preservation. Grass is high in sugar during a period of bright days and cool nights.

Table 1. The effect of harvest date on silage yield and digestibility

Harvest Date	1 May	8 May	15 May	22 May	29 May	5 June	12 June	19 June
Yield (t DM/ha)	2.92	3.99	4.98	5.96	6.79	7.82	8.48	8.93
DMD %	79.9	77.9	77.5	76.6	74.6	69.2	67.9	64.3

Source: Teagasc, Grange Beef Research Centre

Weed Control in Grassland

This is the time of year where docks and other dominant weeds should be identified and controlled in silage swards. A weed infestation in a silage sward will seriously limit grassland quality, silage DM and the efficient use of nutrient inputs. There are a range of products to control all levels of sward infestations. Call our agronomy team to advise on the best option available.

Multi Species Swards (MSS)

As we enter April and when conditions allow, it's time to start thinking of reseeding non-performing paddocks. A perennial ryegrass (PRG) mix with a good inclusion of white clover is always a sensible option to consider in grazing systems. However, over the past number of years, MSS have become very popular and needs to be strongly considered as part of the grazing platform for a number of reasons.

- Requires significantly less chemical N, providing increased profitability.
- Legume inclusion in the sward allows for increased earthworm activity and largely increases the ground water infiltration of the soil preventing water/nutrient run off.
- Improves soil structure and helps to improve compaction issues.
- Offers drought tolerant properties.

As with all reseeding, soil samples need to be taken early to assess the soil pH and available P and K levels. pH levels need to be above 6.4 for PRG swards but closer to 7.0 for MSS and swards with a high inclusion of clover. Lime is still the number one starting point when it comes to soil health and should not be overlooked. Choosing the right field for MSS can be determined by the soil results and the level of weed infestation. If weeds are a problem in the field they will need to be eradicated ahead of desiccation of the field, to reduce the level of infestation when the sward is establishing. We are available to help you in field selection and offer advice in the control of weeds in the sward.

Brett
Brothers Limited

Red Clover



- Multiple cuts in the year.
- Red clover is a more economical source of protein on the farm while still maintaining high quality silage with protein content between 16-20%.
- Red clover fixes its own N allowing surplus available N for surrounding PRG.

For further information on our Grass Seed Mixtures or to request a brochure, contact a member of our Technical Sales Team today.



REMINDER - Crude Protein in Dairy Feed

April is upon us and this is a reminder that for animals over 2 years of age that are grazing full time, the maximum permitted level of protein is 15%. Calves and animals under 2 years of age are excluded. Consult your Brett's Technical Representative for further advice. We look forward to better grazing conditions in April and we will be launching our full range of dairy cubes for the spring/summer period.

Brett Brothers Ltd.,
Callan, Co. Kilkenny
Tel: 056 7755300

Brett Brothers Ltd.,
Windgap, Co. Kilkenny
Tel: 051 648204

Brett Brothers Ltd.,
Ardfinnan, Co. Tipperary
Tel: 052 7466208

Brett Brothers Ltd.,
Portlawn, Co. Waterford
Tel: 051 387396