

Low DM silage rises to Safesil Challenge

Producing beef and lamb as economically as possible is a key objective for Richard and Sarah Jones and over the years, they've found the higher the quality of their home-grown feed, the greater their business profitability.

Farming at Llwynobin, near Montgomery, their 50 pedigree Limousins and 650 Charollais x Texel ewes create plenty of demand for home-grown feed. And with 260 acres rented alongside 197 acres owned by the family - including four children and their grandfather, Bob - there is ample scope to produce that feed at home.

But when feed or forage quality falls short it has a serious impact on the farm's bottom line as large quantities can be wasted and more bought-in concentrate has to be fed.

This has sometimes been the case with the farm's grass silage, which should be the mainstay of the business, but which has sometimes presented challenges.

"Some years were worse than others, but we always found we lost silage at the shoulders and the face of the clamp, and more still would have to be cleaned out of troughs," says Mr Jones.

The farm had had a relationship with Kelvin Cave Ltd over many years as it had always included home-grown crimped cereals in its rations.

"But I'd always resisted buying a silage additive because I didn't want the extra cost and didn't feel we could justify it when the cattle and sheep trade was not very special," he says.

However, after another year of disappointing silage in 2015, he finally reviewed the additive options before harvesting last year's crop.

"Once I'd read the literature, I felt that - although it wasn't the cheapest - the preservative Safesil was the only product that stacked up," he says. "I also spoke to one or two folks who were using it, and



Richard Jones (right) with son Rhodri, who works on the farm.

they all said that once they started they would never be without it."

The case for using Safesil seemed cut and dried, so Mr Jones spoke to Kelvin Cave's technical director, Andy Strzelecki.

"Andy knows exactly the sort of silage we need for our system and, in particular, that we don't like it too dry," he says. "I don't like to wilt for too long because of the nutrient losses which occur after cutting and, secondly, we've found that dry silage doesn't suit the sheep. We feed the ewes a total mixed ration in the run-up to lambing, and if the silage is dry they just pick out the concentrates, which means they don't get a properly balanced ration."

Mindful that the silage dry matter was likely to be fairly low, Mr Strzelecki recommended a new product in the Safesil range. Called Safesil Challenge, it is specifically suited to low dry matter forage and would actually cost less than Mr Jones had feared.

"The original Safesil contains the three preservatives sodium nitrite, potassium sorbate and sodium benzoate," explains Mr Strzelecki. "The first of these is

particularly effective at killing spoilage bacteria while the other two eliminate the activity of yeasts and moulds.

"This means the sodium nitrite is particularly important in wetter silages where the bacterial challenge is highest, while dryer silages - more prone to aerobic spoilage by yeasts and moulds - will benefit more from the other ingredients.

"So, in Safesil Challenge there's a greater emphasis on sodium nitrite," he says. "This also happens to be the least expensive ingredient which means it's more cost-effective to use Safesil Challenge on wet silage than to heavily dose with the original Safesil to achieve a comparable inhibition of bacterial growth."

Mr Jones took up the option for his 2016 silage, clamping his usual 76 acres. He has been feeding the treated silage since the start of last winter and is overwhelmed by the difference.

"Rob Walker from GLW Feeds compiles our rations and he's been able to reduce



the concentrate intake in every group," he says.

The ewes are a case in point as they come indoors between one and six weeks before lambing (depending on whether carrying singles, twins or triplets) and move on to the TMR.

Mr Walker explains: "At the outset we used 600kg silage, 260kg crimped barley and 140kg of a 34% protein mineralised concentrate for every tonne of feed in the wagon. But we found the silage was so palatable they were consuming too much energy, so we cut back the concentrate."

Each tonne now comprises 650kg silage, 210kg crimp and 140kg concentrate which, rationed at 3kg/head, works out at 1.95kg silage, 0.63kg crimp and 0.42kg cake per ewe per day.

"Not only have the ewes consumed more silage and less concentrate, but they have also performed far better too," says Mr Jones. "Their condition has been far better and lambs have been stronger and received plenty of colostrum and we can see how much faster they are getting away.

"We used to get twin lamb disease but now it's almost non-existent, and prolapses are also virtually a thing of the past on this TMR."

For the cattle he has had comparable improvements and again has been able to limit concentrate use.

Mr Walker explains: "The bullocks coming in for winter get 2kg concentrate/day - comprising 85% crimped barley and 15% of a 34% protein mineralised cake - together with ad lib silage and a little straw.

"Usually we would increase the concentrates as they grow, but this year we were able to exploit the virtues of the silage and maintain their concentrates at 2kg/day all the way through," he says.

Mr Jones confirms their performance has been outstanding and says their target daily liveweight gain over the housing period of 1.2kg has been well exceeded, and is now between 1.5 and 1.6kg/day.

The good performance of the stock has been reflected at Welshpool Market where cattle are sold as stores.

"Last week we sold 20 steers and three heifers aged eight to 10 months; they weighed 390kg and we got £2.48/kg, averaging £970 apiece, and that was on a very average day's trading," he says.



A sample of Richard Jones' silage treated with Safesil Challenge.

Pleasing Mr Jones even further is the fact that there is far more silage remaining in the clamp than has ever been the case at the end of winter.

"We have never had this amount left, especially considering the amount of stock we are carrying," he says. "Before we make this year's silage, we will bring what's left forward and make it into a 'sleeping policeman' at the front of the pit, so the fresh silage can go to the back.

"I've got complete confidence in doing this as we have never seen any mould this year and we know the silage is so well preserved," he says.

This year, he will feed his growing base of stock from less land, making 10 acres (around 13%) less silage and putting this land to another use. "We will probably put this field into red clover and use it to finish the lambs faster," he says.

Both the farmer and nutritionist are delighted with performance which has exceeded all expectations.

"If my customers can make high quality forage like this it makes it easier for me to ration and get the performance," says Mr Walker.

"This year we've had absolutely no worries," adds Mr Jones. "Our profits would have been much better if we had used Safesil Challenge a long time ago - but hindsight is a marvellous thing!"

