

Managing forage to cut out waste

David Allin runs a typical British dairy farm and has a typical British farmer's attitude to waste. Avoiding it at all costs wherever he can, he has implemented strict procedures to ensure this applies to forage – the most important source of winter feed on the farm.

Farming with his wife, Rachael, and son, Stuart, at Brittons Farm in Goldworthy, near Bideford in Devon, he says this includes using the top-of-the-range silage preservative, Safesil; using heavy machinery to roll the clamp; taking the time to cover his silage as thoroughly as possible with the most impermeable sheeting on the market; and keeping the silage face flat and tidy during feed-out.

The results, he believes, have been more than worthwhile, as his forages – comprising up to four cuts of grass as well as wholecrop wheat and maize – have lasted well throughout even the hottest summers and cut out his earlier losses.

“Maize was the first crop we tried with Safesil, and from the first year we tried it we could see there was no waste,” he says. “The face always stayed cold – even when we used it through the hot summer weather – and there was no wastage at the shoulders.”

However, he insists that sheeting is also carried out meticulously and says that using O₂ Barrier 2in1 has significantly helped with the process.

“O₂ Barrier 2in1 is applied as a single sheet but separates into two when it makes contact with the silage,” explains Rachel Webber, Kelvin Cave's area manager for West Devon and Cornwall. “The lower layer is a vacuum film which separates from the top film as it absorbs moisture from the silage, and is sucked on to the forage to form an airtight seal.”

This effect ensures anaerobic conditions are rapidly created while the extreme impermeability of the sheeting – allowing through six to ten times less oxygen than previous systems – prevents further air from entering the clamp.



“Previously we used two separate sheets but have found that by applying them together as one, it is so easy to use and has saved so much time,” says Mr Allin. “You can guarantee when you're sheeting that the wind will always come from somewhere, and when you have two sheets to apply separately, the process is more difficult.”

Once the sheeting is covering his well-compacted silage – which has been rolled with a heavy telehandler which has smaller tyres than his tractor and so concentrates the weight – he takes great care with the sealing.

“Some of our clamps have earth banks so we have to take particular care with these,” he says. “We actually use the top sheeting from the previous year to line the sides of the earth clamp and leave these sheets hanging over the side before sheeting the top.”

“Then we put sandbags on both side and top sheets and fold them both over, adding another layer of sandbags and securing the cover on top of the whole thing.”

This is said to cut out wastage on even these difficult clamps, while the silage in the concrete-sided pits is said to have the ‘textbook look’.

“The maize in last year's maize clamp was our best ever and had no waste at all,” he says. “And I've noticed all of the forage has had a better analysis over the last few years.”

The 135 cows at Brittons Farm are also milking well on it, yielding 8,500 litres at 4.25% fat and 3.35% protein from the Total Mixed Ration (fed to maintenance plus 26 litres) with a top-up of concentrates for the higher yielders.

“We are certainly very happy with the forage and this year's crop is looking good too,” says Mr Allin. “But there are many other areas of the farm which we still have to improve!”

Pictured above are farmer David Allin with Kelvin Cave's Rachel Webber

