

# 10 Key Steps to Successful Silage



P L A N N I N G	<p><b>1. Why conserve forage?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your business goals?</li> <li>• Does silage fit into the whole farm plan by meeting the production and management goals?</li> <li>• Is silage the most economic and/or practical option to fill a feed gap, to balance the ration or utilise excess pasture?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>2. Always target high quality silage; it:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximises animal production potential.</li> <li>• Reduces production, storage and feedout costs per unit of stored ME (metabolisable energy).</li> <li>• Increases management flexibility.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>3. Minimise costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are your harvesting, storage and feedout systems well matched to maximise efficiency and minimise costs?</li> <li>• Should you invest capital in silage equipment? Should you consider using a contractor?</li> <li>• Will capital investment increase efficiency, and therefore increase profitability?</li> </ul>
M A K I N G	<p><b>4. Start with high quality forage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grow crops and pastures that produce high quality forage and have high yield potential.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>5. Cut at the recommended growth stage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forage quality declines as the crop or pasture matures. Time of harvest is important.</li> <li>• Consider the effect on regrowth of pastures and forage crops.</li> <li>• Maximise pasture utilisation by integrating silage cuts with grazing.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>6. Wilt as quickly as possible to target dry matter (ideally within 24 hours, but less than 48)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leave the swath as wide as possible;</li> <li>• Use a mower conditioner;</li> <li>• Use a tedder to spread the windrow.</li> <li>• Don't over-wilt – field losses increase and silage is harder to compact.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>7. Minimise losses (of quality and quantity) during harvest and storage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harvest at the target dry matter level.</li> <li>• Certain additives will improve silage fermentation if wilting conditions are poor.</li> <li>• Even when good silage preservation is expected, inoculants can improve silage quality and animal production.</li> <li>• Additives will not compensate for poor silage management (late harvest, slow wilting or poor sealing).</li> </ul> <p><b>Chopped silage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roll pits/stacks/bunkers throughout the harvest process to eliminate air.</li> <li>• Finer chop will be easier to compact.</li> <li>• Seal pits or stacks as soon as harvest is complete, ideally within 3 days of starting large pits or stacks.</li> </ul> <p><b>Baled silage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim for high density bales to minimise air pockets.</li> <li>• Wrap or seal bales <b>as soon as possible</b> after baling.</li> <li>• Minimise damage to stretchwrap by wrapping at the storage site or use specialist equipment to transport bales to storage.</li> </ul>
F E E D I N G	<p><b>8. Ensure feedout system will support high intake</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ease of removing and eating the silage (accessibility) affects intake</li> <li>• The feeding space allocated per animal and access time will affect intake.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>9. Minimise losses during feedout</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good feeding facilities will reduce losses.</li> <li>• Control access during feeding to eliminate trampling and fouling.</li> <li>• Feed regularly and only in quantities that will be consumed between feeds.</li> <li>• Keep feedout areas clean to prevent contamination of fresh batches.</li> <li>• High feed quality will reduce wastage.</li> </ul>
E V A L U A T E	<p><b>10. Evaluate the whole silage system – how can it be made more profitable?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep records of field operations – were all operations done at the right time? What could have been improved?</li> <li>• Keep records of what crops/pasture are stored.</li> <li>• Use feed tests to monitor silage quality? Is it acceptable? Given the parent forage, should it be better?</li> <li>• Use feed tests to monitor animal production.</li> <li>• Monitor storage losses. Can you explain why you are getting losses in storage?</li> <li>• Estimate feedout losses. How can they be reduced?</li> <li>• Monitor silage costs. Are there opportunities for reducing costs?</li> </ul>