



**FARMING**  
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## Multi Cut Silage

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There is increasing interest amongst dairy producers, in the main, in taking upwards of five or six smaller more frequent cuts of silage in a season. The industry in Wales has taken note of the benefits and gains that Dutch and US farmers are making with a “multi-cut silage” system and want to try it for themselves- but what are the benefits and what needs to be in place to make it work?



**Benefits?** On analysis, silage from the multi-cut system comes back with higher energy (MJ ME) and higher crude protein (CP). More leafy, younger grass with less stem means improved quality in a more consistent reliable feed.



**Gains?** These come in higher cow intakes from silage that's more digestible, better milk quality and higher production, improved rumen health and fertility, more milk from forage and lower purchased feed costs.

### Any drawbacks?

#### Higher contracting charges?

These costs can be offset by the improvements in silage quality that boost milk production. For every 5.3MJ of extra energy available through improvements to silage quality, an extra litre of milk can be produced. 200 tonnes of silage could produce an extra 37,700 litres of milk worth £10,900 (29p/litre).



#### More soil compaction?

Carry out inspections of the silage fields regularly; dig holes with a spade to assess compaction and if found, carry out remedial action to alleviate it. Consider the use of flotation tyres on tractors and trailers and adopting a controlled traffic farming approach to limit wheelings.



#### Contamination?

Concerns around grass contamination by slurry applied between cuts can be addressed by applying slurry by injection or trailing shoe before first cut and switching to bagged fertiliser between cuts. If this isn't possible, slurry applied between cuts should be very low DM and always applied by injection or trailing shoe.



**Be prepared:** Multi cut silage needs the “ground-work” in place. Check and correct soil pH, phosphate and potash indexes, check and correct any soil compaction issues, have the right leys (intermediate and late heading, diploid and tetraploid perennial ryegrasses) in place, fertiliser / slurry in store and make sure your contractor is ready to go when you are.

### How?

If everything is in place plan your cutting dates and management carefully. If you're aiming for 5 cuts at an interval of 28-35 days or when the crop reaches 3500 to 4000kgDM/ha (according to current Dutch practice), you may be starting to cut in April.



### Grass nutrition

Have a nutrient management plan in place and apply slurry when soil conditions allow and according to crop need early in winter (10 weeks) ahead of the first cut at 25,000ltr/ha (2000 gal/ac). Inject it or use a trailing shoe- don't use a splash plate. The advice about nitrogen still holds true- 2 units /ac per day- but you'll be applying less than for a 2/3 cut system- around 75kg/ha (60 units/ac). If you're using a compound fertiliser choose a product that meets grass needs and matches soil indexes- consult a FACTS qualified advisor. Subsequent slurry applications between cuts should be avoided or use very low dry matter slurry which is injected.

## Cutting and Clamping

Cut early in the day and remember, these are light crops that need less time to wilt: ted out within 2 hours and target around 30% dry matter -it can be in the clamp in the afternoon. Use a homofermentative (*Lactobacillus plantarum* or *Pediococcus*) inoculant because the crop has higher protein and a lower sugar content. It's younger, leafier grass and easy to consolidate in the clamp so chop length can be longer- 6 cm and the clamp should be filled in 6" layers starting from the outside and evenly spread for rolling. Seal the clamp well to ensure best fermentation and limit losses. Be aware that opening and closing of larger clamps more frequently may result in some loss in quality if not carried out with best practice; adapting by having more smaller clamps may be one way of addressing this issue.



## What results are other farmers getting?

As a result of higher quality silage in the ration cow intakes are reported to increase by 1-3kg DM/cow/day allowing you to target more milk from forage.

If, for example, silage quality improves from 10.5ME to 11.5ME, an improvement of 1ME for every kg of silage in the clamp would be equivalent to an extra 200,000 MJ energy from 200t of silage. It takes 5.3MJ of energy to produce a litre of milk; the extra 200,000 MJ energy means an extra 37,700 litres of milk- £10,900 extra income @29p/ltr- as a result of improved silage quality. Many farmers who have changed to a multi cut system are reporting an increase of 1 unit of ME in their silage quality.

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## Get updates from Farming Connect Farms

[New Dairy Farm](#) Read about silage with 72D, 11.6ME, CP 16.7 and 4 litres more milk per cow /day); take a look at what [Pied House Farm](#) and [Gelli Aur](#) have been doing too.

