



Jimmy Lillis pictured with his Teagasc advisor Michael Bourke. The salt applied to the clamp is visible.

Cork drystock farmer makes superb silage with no waste

Jimmy Lillis shares his insights on silage-making with Tom Fallon

Attention to detail in rolling the pit, coating the full pit with salt and covering with four sheets of plastic all help to ensure there is minimal waste.

"I buy in about 50, 6- to 12- month old bullocks and rear them to beef. Quality silage is essential to making money," says Jimmy Lillis.

The farm at Craig, Shanballymore, Co Cork, is very prone to drought. He doesn't graze the silage ground in the spring so, given the high grass cover in late March this year from earlier applications of slurry, he spread just a half bag of urea per acre.

He took the first cut of silage on the 22nd April and got a yield of about 5.5 tonnes per acre (equivalent to 5.5 bales/acre). We expect this silage to be 80 DMD.

"Achieving quality silage begins with rolling the fields early in the year," says

Jimmy. "Gaps in the fields are well 'stoned up' and the pit is cleaned and well prepared."

The mower has a spreader so the grass is distributed over the full width. Normally the grass is cut after dinner and picked up the following day.

"Getting grass just right is a fine line," says Jimmy. "Too dry and it is fierce hard to pack." He hasn't used a tedder for a few years and he will row up sooner in very hot weather.

Rolling the pit

Jimmy places strong emphasis on rolling the pit, "Every load gets at least some rolling." He does the rolling himself. The 15 x 11m clamp is dome shaped and up to 3m high. Five, 20 kg bags of food grade salt, costing a few euro each, are spread over the surface before putting on cling type plastic.

This equates to 2/3 of a kg of salt per m² compared with 3kg/m² or more that is used on maize silage pits. Three sheets of plastic are placed above the cling film. Initially a limited number of tyres are placed around the pit.

The plastic is tightened up twice the first week and then weekly until the pit has settled. At that point the pit is covered with tyres.

"When opening the pit we pull away the top three covers so there is enough silage for three weeks," says Jimmy. A section of cling film is cut as required.

He said it is 'amazing' that the salt will still be visible. He uses an ordinary grab to take out the silage.

Jimmy makes bales for the 2nd cut unless 10 or 15 acres are ready at the same time. "I try to mind the land by not cutting the same field twice in the one year," he concludes.