

Pre-ensilability testing

Advice on the nitrogen and sugar content of your grass allowing you to determine the right time to cut.

Why test grass before cutting?

A key practice for good fermentation of grass is to ensure sugars are 3% or higher, this ensures the bacteria work to their best and the pH drops quicker, in order to preserve the feed value of the crop in the sealed pit or bale. Grass sugars are converted to acid during the fermentation process. This acid preserves the feed value of the crop in the sealed pit. High sugar content levels are found in ryegrass swards. Mowing in the afternoon when sugar levels have built up, help to increase sugar levels also.

Another important practice is to ensure that nitrate levels are not high. If nitrate levels are high, it increases the buffering capacity making it more difficult to bring down the pH level. Crops with high buffering capacity may have a poor initial fermentation. However, nitrates are of secondary importance to sugar levels. Grass will ensile correctly with up to 800ppm nitrate provided sugars are adequate. Wilting the crop to >28% DM helps overcome effects of high nitrate.

As grass grows it uses on average, 2 units of Nitrogen per day, the most likely cause of a high nitrogen reading is that not enough time has lapsed since the date of fertiliser or slurry application.



Steps to increasing grass sugar levels:

- Cut grass in the afternoon and evening when sugars are highest.
- Aim for a rapid wilt for a max. of 24 hours.
- Grass should be wilted as quickly as possible to minimise sugar losses, this can be done by spreading out the crop over the land.
- Avail of the pre-ensilability nitrates and sugar tests to help determine the quality of the silage.

For further information or to avail of these testing services, please contact your local Farm Commercial Specialist or Aurivo Animal Feeds (Tel: 094 98 60234).