

An all-round forage service

As farmers needs have changed, so Alvis Contracting has also adapted and now looks to work more closely with its customers, including providing advice and helping them to gain more from their crops.

Based just south of Bristol, Alvis Contracting started life in the 1980s as a machinery division within farmers and cheddar cheese producers Alvis Bros, who produce some 3,200 tonnes of conventional and 1,300 tonnes of organic cheddar a year.

Today, harvesting grass silage for the company's 1000 dairy cows accounts for about 15% of the annual silage workload. The remainder is spread over a range of conventional and organic farms, covering an area from the Severn Estuary up onto the Mendip hills.

"The relationship we have with our customers has changed a lot over the last few years," says Daniel Harding, who joined the company as a machinery operator in 1989 and now co-owns it with Alvis Bros.

MAXIMISING FEED FROM FORAGE

"No longer do we look to just turn up, put silage in the clamp and go. A lot of dairy farmers are wanting to maximise their feed from forage as it's a cheap way to produce milk. They are looking to take multiple cuts, little and often, which means that instead of traditionally starting in May, we now start in early April and finish later, which is good for us.

"We look to work closer with them, providing them with advise and help on things like overseeding, ley management and how to manage their forage systems in order to help them achieve their aims. We also supply seed and a soil sampling service, and have recently taken on Matthew Green who is a trained nutritionist and general manager within the farm services team."

To handle this workload and to ensure that they can provide a prompt, timely service, Alvis Contracting run a team of three JAGUAR foragers, led by a JAGUAR 950, with support from two 870s. An older 870 is used as a back-up machine. The three lead JAGUAR foragers were bought new in 2018 from CLAAS WESTERN at Frome as part of a multi-machine deal that also included a set of DISCO 9400 reverse drive mowers, two LINER 3600 rakes, a LINER 2900 rake and a QUADRANT 4200 baler.

DEALER SUPPORT

"We have been running JAGUAR foragers since 1989 and have had 15 during that time," states Daniel. "The JAGUAR has always been a good forager and holds its value very well. But just as important is the service support we receive from CLAAS WESTERN and occasionally HAMBLYS when further south, which is key to us. You can't knock the support both provide, no matter where we are, and the ability they have to obtain parts overnight."

"The JAGUAR 950 will be the first forager to go out at the beginning of the season and the last in at the end," says Farm Services Manager James Ball. "Having tried it on our previous foragers, any two JAGUAR foragers can be equipped with SHREDLAGE processors, as many of our customers have found there is a considerable benefit. The longer chop length has enabled them to avoid needing to use straw in the diet. However, here again we have needed to work with them and explain the benefits and why they should change to SHREDLAGE."

DYNAMIC POWER

Having DYNAMIC POWER on all three machines and automatic engine speed reduction at the headland on the JAGUAR 950, all helps reduce fuel use. "We work across a wide range of farms and crops, from smaller farms and fields in the valley to nice big 20+ha fields on the Mendips. Crops also vary considerably, from lighter crops on organic farms to heavier yields from new sown leys, so the ability with DYNAMIC POWER for the engine to match power output to the crop works extremely well," explains James.

TELEMATICS

TELEMATICS has also been specified on all the new JAGs. "The ability to look at idle time and the overall efficiency of each machine is a great benefit," says James. "On longer hauls, it's easy to see that we need more trailers if the forager is obviously spending too long sat there idle."

"Another benefit is that farmers now often have crops in more than one place," adds Daniel. "Using TELEMATICS it's easy to keep track of all the work we have done for a customer, including the little bits they often ask you to do 'while you are there' and the roadwork between fields, which we can then overlay against the DEFRA Magic Maps to ensure accuracy."

YIELD MAPPING

Yield monitoring has also been fitted to the JAGUAR 950. "It's early days and there as an extra service," says James. "But we have already had three customers who are using the information to gain an accurate picture of what they have in the clamp and the feed value for their winter ration. For the future, the yield mapping information could also be used as a basis for variable rate fertiliser application. Again it's all down to providing customers with a complete service," he concludes.



James Ball (left) and Daniel Harding
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