

Multicut forage quality

A drive to maximise forage cropping and milk from forage lies at the heart of Britten Farming's dairy operation.

Britten Farming were the winners of the 'Dairy Feed Efficiency' award at the ForFarmers 'Excellence in Farming Awards' last year, in recognition of their focus on producing quality forage.

Recent years have seen the Britten's adopt a multicut silage system from a range of grassland on the 260ha farm at Downhead in Somerset, including permanent pasture, short term IRG leys and red clover leys. For this year they are also trialling IRG cover crops, which are sown after the 52ha of maize is harvested in late September and then goes back into maize once the grass has been harvested. All the maize is grown under plastic in order to improve crop value and bring forward harvest, as the farm is at 750ft in the Mendips and mainly north facing.

FIVE CUTS PER MONTH

Working on a 'little and often' principle, starting in late April, five cuts of silage are taken on a monthly basis, comprising initially of 80ha of 1st cut, dropping to 60ha for second and 40ha thereafter. The attention to detail in order to maximise forage production also extends to regular reseeding with 5 year leys. A lot of attention is paid to maintaining soil pH above 6.5 with regular liming and keeping P & K indices above 2.

The results are evident in the quality of their grass silage, where the aim is to ideally achieve an ME of 11.8-12, proteins between 16-18%, and a D value in the high 70s. Fed as part of a ration based on 60% maize and 40% grass silage, with an 18% blend and treated home produced wheat, yields from the 280-cow Holstein Friesian milking herd is currently running at 9,300 litres with the aim that ideally 5,000 litres should come from forage. This will be in part achieved following the businesses decision to switch from an all year round calving herd to an autumn block, something which is currently in transition.

Mowing is the responsibility of Robin Day, using a new set of DISCO 3200C CONTOUR front and rear mowers on an 185hp ARION 650 CEBIS, with a contractor then completing the subsequent operations. "We ran a DISCO combination for a number of years, and still have the rear mower, which is now 15 years old, as a back-



up and and for pre-mowing and topping during the grazing season. We then handed the mowing responsibilities over to the contractors as well, but the loss of control during such a critical phase of the silage making process quickly led to a decision to take back control and reinvest in a new set of DISCO mowers for the 2019 season," explains Robin.

SIMPLE AND CLEAN

"I have been very pleased with them. They cope with all conditions and are very simple to adjust and use. It's easy also to adjust conditioning intensity, which is good as I do regularly adjust the intensity depending on crops and conditions. We also have a lot of slopes and undulating land, but the mowers follow the ground really well and leave a very consistent and clean finish. Being able to cut a lot of grass in a reasonably short period of time to maximise weather windows and potential wilt time is vital in the silage making operation.

"I also regularly change or turn the blades so as to have a fresh edge at the start of each cut, which is important for a clean cut and quick regrowth. But this couldn't be simpler and only takes about 10-15 minutes. The ARION 650 is a good match for the mowers and in a good field I can comfortably mow about 8.0 hectares an hour."

The Britten's have a long association with CLAAS machinery due to the service and support they have received from CLAAS Western which, says Robin "is fantastic and they are always there for you, which is very important." In addition to the ARION 650, the farm is also home to a small ELIOS used for yard work and, in addition to a new SCORPION 736 bought last autumn, an ARION 550 CIS+ is the latest in a long line of Le Mans built tractors going back to the first CLAAS tractors and Renault before that.

