

FARMING

FARM FOCUS

Busy silage season for Skryne contractor

WRAP New bale film reduces wastage of valuable fodder

CATHAL SWAN AND his wife Julie and their son Shane farm at Skryne, Tara. They have a flock of 600 Texel x Suffolk ewes and sell their lambs to Irish Country Meats in Navan. Lambs sold per ewe average almost 1.75 and lambing takes place in mid-January. The ewes are fed on haylage and McAuley's sheep ration. Many of the ewes have more than two lambs so these extra lambs are fostered by other

ewes or reared on Lamlac ewe milk replacer.

Cathal and Shane manage Swan Agri Ltd a successful family silage contracting business which was established in 1984 after Cathal finished his education.

"The sheep enterprise nicely complements the agri contracting business which is less busy in the spring time," Cathal explains.

Swan Agri carry out silage



Cathal Swan, with his wife Julie, their son Shane and David Hogan, agri manager, Drummonds Ltd.

contracting for local cattle, dairy and sheep farmers, and have some equine customers for their top quality haylage. In addition, they spread slurry and manure for local farmers. Their machinery includes a NC, Major and a Redrock 3500 gallon slurry tanker (fitted with a trailing shoe), along with a Ktwo and Hi Spec muck spreaders. In addition they also provides a hedge cutting service for local farmers and other customers using a 15 t Kobelco hedge cutter on tracks which has a saw and three shears.

The silage machinery includes six John Deere tractors, a new Claas self-propelled silage harvester, a McHale F5500 for baling up to 4,000 bales, along with a McHale Fusion 3 plus for making thousands of grass silage bales. Cathal and Shane also cut a few thousand acres of grass for pit silage.

Other forage machinery includes John Deere mowers

(triple combination), Claas, Krone tedders plus other equipment. Swan Agri offer customers an all in service from mowing to tedding, baling or clamping the silage. Shane trained as a John Deere mechanic with Meath Farm Machinery so he is able to maintain and service the machinery of season or during quiet periods in the business.

After using the Baletite mantle film successfully to replace netwrap for a two seasons on the recommendation of David Hogan, agri manager with Drummonds Ltd, Cathal agreed to use the Silotite Pro after he had problems with another brand of balewrap so he found that "there was a very good tack on this film."

The reduced losses that resulted through the use of the film and film wrapping system means that the farmer has more and better quality forage to feed to his herd. The value of the extra silage conserved is

around €5/bale. Cathal says that using Baletite is more user friendly than netwrap, bales hold their shape better, are easier to move and far less likely to rip during handling.

Silage quality is definitely better, especially for higher dry matter (DM) grass, her adds.

"Silage is sweeter and there is no mould so my customers appreciate this and had no problem switching to the new Film & Film system. Before this we usually had to cut open the bales to check on haylage quality and check for moulds and wastage."

To further improve the nutritional value of his haylage used for sheep, Cathal has a bulk tank mounted on a front end loader fitted with a dribble bar which can add molasses to the bales before wrapping.

SilotitePro black balewrap film is on a 1800m reel instead of the conventional 1500m reel. This additional length

allows users to produce 20 per cent more bales per reel. The resultant cost savings are further enhanced by a reduction in the reel changes necessary. Un-boxing and changing a reel takes about seven minutes, so a contractor wrapping say 350 bales a day can save around 30 minutes daily.

Baletite is an innovative pre-orientated film that replaces netwrap in round silage bales. Specifically created for the next generation of baling machines such as the McHale Fusion 3 Plus, it has been designed to enhance the ensiling process and protect the bale contents. Being a film, Baletite provides an additional air barrier whilst helping to retain a better bale shape by exerting a tighter grip around the bale circumference. It reduces wastage of valuable silage, as, unlike netwrap, no baled fodder can become enmeshed in it.

Its production from the same base material as Silotite Pro balewrap means users don't have to separate the Baletite from balewrap after use. Instead, both Baletite and the balewrap can be recycled together thereby saving valuable time and labour costs.

Excellent trial results have been obtained in Britain for the Film & Film system by Dr Dave Davies of Silage Solutions Ltd, who acts as an independent consultant to the Silage Advisory Centres. Dr Davies is a well-known forage expert and is a former senior research scientist at the Institute of Grassland & Environmental Research (IGER) at Aberystwyth in Wales.

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