

Silage quality on Northern Ireland farm improves following regular applications of Calcifert Sulphur

Quality of grass silage on Reggie Lilburn's farm in Dromore, Country Down, has improved considerably and resulted in significant financial benefits, thanks to the application of Calcifert Sulphur.

Calcifert Sulphur is a granulated fertiliser containing 39% CaO & 56% Sulphur (SO₃), and is designed to provide essential calcium and sulphur to soils. Having enjoyed success using the product over the previous two years, Reggie (pictured) made a single application of Calcifert Sulphur to all his fields in March 2014, at a rate of 125 kg/ha (1 bag/acre). Slurry was applied to all fields before each of the farms three silage cuts, along with nitrogen fertiliser.



Silage quality

2014 silage analysis is displayed below and shows that the quality of forage produced on farm was of consistently high quality across cuts, particularly when compared with the seasons average for the area.

	1st Cut	Area Average	3rd Cut	Area Average
Dry Matter %	31.2	27.1	31.5	28.5
Protein % DM	14.2	10.8	14.7	12.6
ME (MJ/Kg)	11.6	10.6	11.5	10.6
D Value (%DM)	72	66	72	66
FIM intake	105	88	107	90

With sulphur forming the core element of two amino acids essential in the construction of protein, the exceptionally high protein rate of Reggie's first cut silage can be directly accounted for by the application of Calcifert Sulphur on the farm.

These higher protein levels also ensure high levels of sugar accumulation within grass, which improves the fermentation and future digestibility of silage.

Continues over...

This is the third year that Calcifert Sulphur has been used on Reggie's farm and it is now viewed as an integral part of his annual fertiliser application regime because of improvements that have been observed.

Reggie estimates that grass yields have improved to around 2.3t DM/ha (0.95t DM/ac) and, as well as higher quantity of forage, the quality is much better too, with protein levels increasing and cattle achieving higher rates of dry matter forage intake.

Financial benefits

Based on the first cut silage analysis from the table provided above, farmers utilising Calcifert Sulphur would be able to formulate diets that are £0.41p per cow, per day cheaper compared to farms that are achieving the nutritional value identified in the silage of the average areas tested.

Reggie's herd comprises 250 autumn calving cows and assuming that the herd is housed and fed a full ration for 180 days, the farm could save £18,450 (£74.16/hd) by feeding silage with similar nutritional traits to that analysed in his first and third cuts.

The high quality of silage indicates that concentrate feeds could also be reduced by 1kg per cow, per day compared to previous year. Assuming approximately 75 of Reggie's heifers are put on a new, low concentrate diet, the annual winter-feed saving (based on a diet costing £160/ton and animals being fed for 180 days) should be £2,160. This equates to a saving of £28.80/heifer and a reduction in concentrate use by 3.5 tons.

By using Calcifert Sulphur, Reggie will save a total of £20,700 on the farm this winter in feed costs alone.

Summary

With falling milk prices putting a squeeze on profitability, the need of quality forage has never been so important. Just like Reggie, balanced fertiliser programmes must be followed to ensure the growth of nutritionally rich forages, which will enable farmers to maximise silage use in the future and reduce feed costs.

About Calcifert Sulphur...

Applying Calcifert Sulphur is a quick and easy way to supply both calcium and sulphur to soil.

With a typical analysis of calcium as CaO: 39% and sulphur expressed as SO₃: 56%, Calcifert Sulphur is one of the purest calcium sulphate products available on the market. Calcifert Sulphur has a neutralising value of zero, meaning it won't affect the pH of your soil.

It can be easily applied using a tractor mounted fertiliser spreader, providing flexibility to farmers and growers.

