Diary for August

HENSLEY FARM DIARY FOR AUGUST

On 5th August we harvested our wholecrop triticale. Triticale is a type of corn in between barley and wheat and gives a greater feed value than barley as it is higher in starch and energy. It also suits our farming system as it is easier to grow organically than wheat.

This year we grew three fields of triticale. The ground was spread with slurry in early Spring and ploughed immediately to retain maximum nutrients to feed the crop. The soil was then prepared with a Cambridge roller and the corn tilled with a power harrow combination drill in late March. As we are organic no fertilisers or sprays are used on the crop.

"Cambridge Rollers used to prepare the soil for tilling after ploughing."

In two of the fields, grass seeds were also sown to harvest as one crop. The reason for doing this is that the grass will go on and grow again after the crop has been cut, providing autumn grazing for the cattle. In these two fields a slightly lower rate of triticale was sown (60kg per acre compared to 70kg) to allow sunlight for the grass to grow alongside it.

The term “wholecrop” is given because the whole crop is harvested as one (unlike combining when the straw and grain are kept separate). It is also harvested slightly earlier than traditional combining so that the straw is still a bit green and the grain isn’t quite ripe, producing a high energy feed which in turn produces high quality milk.

"The silage clamp is made of concrete panels which are lined with a new black plastic sheet each year. This photo shows the sheet going up."

The crop is harvested using a self-propelled forager with a special attachment for cutting the stalks. The forage harvester cracks each grain of corn so the cows are able to digest the feed better. The straw part of the crop provides a good source of fibre for the cows’ winter diet, but is more appetising when harvested in this way.

"The sheet is up and we're ready for the first load!"

"The first load of the day tips up in the clamp - always a welcome sight!"

The wholecrop is stored in a similar way to grass silage, but in a separate clamp (the name given to silage sheds). As it is particularly important to make sure no air can get to it, the crop is covered with silofilm (a bit like cling film!) before being covering with a black plastic sheet and old car tyres. It will be left to ferment for about six weeks before we start feeding it to our cows.

The story of harvesting our wholecrop triticale in pictures

Cambridge Rollers used to prepare the soil for tilling after ploughing

The silage clamp is made of concrete panels which are lined with a new black plastic sheet each year. This photo shows the sheet going up

The sheet is up and we're ready for the first load!

The first load of the day tips up in the clamp - always a welcome sight!

Field of Wholecrop Triticale before it was cut

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Harvesting the wholecrop to bring back to the clamp

Self Propelled Forage Harvester

Wholecrop Triticale after it has been through the forage harvester

Filling the trailer

The triticale was undersown with grass and you can see how this will go on and keep growing for the cows to graze

Last load of the day and the silage clamp is full - a relief to know we will have a good crop to feed the cows when they start calving in the autumn

Alan uses a 'buckrake' to lift the wholecrop to the top of the pit

A full clamp of wholecrop - the 8ft panels are fill right to the very top

The clamp has now been rolled to compact it and get rid of any air to avoid the crop going mouldy

The clamp is now ready to be covered with 'silofilm' to keep the air out

The final stage is to cover the clamp with a black plastic silage sheet and tyres - job done!!