

# SILAGE POLICY CHANGE SAVES TIME & MONEY



A change in silage-making policy over the last two years has resulted in savings in money and time, plus prizes, for new QMS Board member **Kate Rowell**, who farms at Hundleshope, just south of Peebles, with her husband Ed.

**H**undleshope is one of the QMS monitor farms and totals 1,797 acres (727 ha). It is a diverse mix, with approximately 1,450 acres being heather hill (peaking at 2,200 feet), home to a 350-ewe Scottish Blackface flock. On the lower ground, the Rowells run an out-wintered herd of 70 suckler cows and 430 home-bred Scotch Mules and Texel cross Mule ewes, plus 170 hogs.

The grain and straw from approximately 30 acres of spring barley are all used on-farm. In early 2013, the monitor farm community group persuaded the Rowells to aim to make better silage. "Previously we had gone for quantity instead of quality, traditionally silaging towards the end of July, aiming for bulk," recalled Kate.

"The group convinced us to take an earlier cut from younger grass. So, in 2013, we cut a field of one-year-old Italian Ryegrass on 20th June, which had been grazed up until 23rd/24th May."

**The cut of young grass analysed at (Dry Matter basis):**

- Dry Matter (DM)** - 428g/kg (42.8%)
- Metabolisable Energy (ME)** - 11.9 Mj/Kg DM
- Crude Protein (CP)** - 136g/kg (13.6%)

Samples of this silage won second prize in the silage competitions at the 2013 AgriScot and Scottish Winter Fair events.

The Rowells house their in-lamb cross-bred ewes prior to lambing. Traditionally, housed twin-bearing ewes had been fed twice a day with heavy bags of barley and protein, along with haylage. Ewe feeding had consumed three hours of every day.

Thanks to the feed quality of their young-cut silage, in 2014 Kate and Ed were able to replace the barley and haylage with the high-energy value silage, fed ad-lib with added minerals. Protein was supplied in the form of soya.

Sheep specialist Dr John Vipond from SAC Consulting (a division of SRUC, Scotland's Rural College) had spoken at one of the Peebles monitor farm meetings, when he had recommended to the group to supply the increased protein demanded by multiple-bearing females in the modern sheep breeds, by feeding extra Digestible Undegradable Protein (DUP) to in-lamb ewes in the lead-up to lambing.

John had explained that soya bean meal is an accepted source of DUP. He recommended feeding soya daily at the rate of 100g per lamb carried, from three weeks before the ewes are due to start lambing.

Working with John, Kate and Ed ran a soya comparison trial in 2014 and fed one group of twin-bearing ewes 200 grammes per head/day conventional soya bean meal (Hipro soya), while the other group, also twin-bearing, was fed 100 grammes per head/day of protected soya. John explained that protected soya has a similar overall protein content as normal soya but has approximately double the DUP content (90% vs. 45%). He added that by feeding protected soya instead of Hipro soya, the actual soya feeding rate can be halved, while still providing the same amount of DUP.

"We split 156 twin-bearing ewes of similar weight and body condition score into two equal groups," explained Ed. "They weighed around 65 kilos at 2.5 condition score."

"Four weeks before lambing, five ewes from each group were blood tested to measure energy supply," added Kate, who is also a veterinary surgeon. "All were normal."

"We recorded the birth weights of lambs in each group, with the Protected soya group lambs weighing, on average, 0.3 kg (11 ounces) less (4.6 kilo versus 4.9) than lambs born in the Hipro soya fed group."

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The Rowells are enthusiastic about their new in-lamb feeding regime. "The better silage meant that we didn't have to heave heavy bags of barley up and down the feeding troughs, which was a very welcome bonus," commented Ed. "The feeding of good quality silage, minerals and soya saved us a lot of time when there are not enough hours in the day as it is. It made a big positive difference to us – instead of taking three hours a day to feed the ewes, we spent, at the most, three quarters of an hour."

In 2014, high-quality and prize-winning silage was again made at Hundleshope, with two fields cut on 29th June analysing at 11.4 and 11.9 for ME. In February this year, the Rowells learnt that they had won second prize in the East of Scotland Grassland Society Annual Silage Competition for Big Bale Silage.

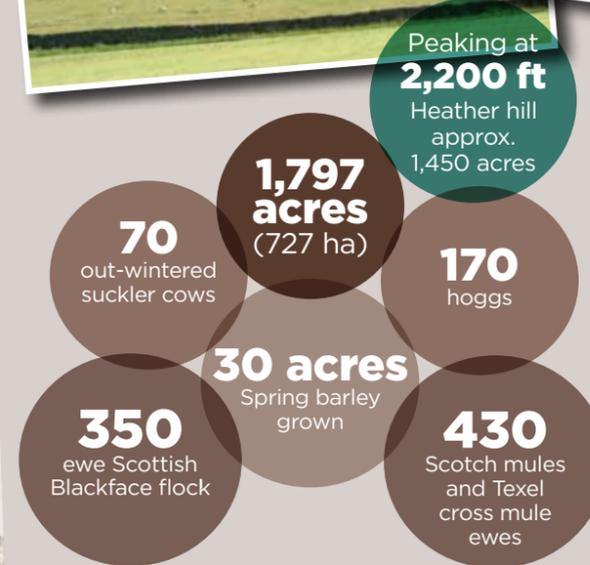
During this year's lambing, Kate and Ed, based on the success of last year, tried to establish more information on the comparative performance of lambs from ewes fed Protected soya pre-lambing.

"We split the equal weight and Body Score twin-bearing ewes into two groups again this year," explained Kate. "However, this time, instead of daily feeding Hipro soya to one group and Protected soya to the other group, we just fed Protected soya, but at different intervals. We fed one group 100 grammes per head, per day, with the other group receiving 233 grammes per head on Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

"We also recorded lamb birth weights, plus lambing ease and assessment of colostrum, and plan to weight the lambs from the two groups again in May, two months after lambing, to compare their performance."

**HUNDLESHOPE: AT A GLANCE**

Monitor Farm since November 2012



The results of this farm study will be presented at a future monitor farm meeting held later this summer. For more information about the monitor farm programme, please visit [www.qmscotland.co.uk/monitor-farms](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/monitor-farms)