

Silage Sausages

There is not much grass to eat during the winter months and it is of relatively poor quality, so cows are kept indoors. Not only does this keep them warm and dry, it also prevents their hooves churning up — or “poaching” — damp fields. Farmers therefore need to grow food in the summer for use in the winter. This is called silage, which can be made from grass, wheat, maize or other crops such as lucerne (alfalfa). The silage at Pierrepont Farm is either grown on the farm itself or under contract locally. It is a Countryside Restoration Trust policy that no silage or hay is cut on any of its properties before 1st July each year, to avoid disturbing ground-nesting birds.

Contractors with specialised equipment store the silage in airtight, oxygen-free “sausages” (properly called AgBags), where it undergoes a fermentation process before stabilising at a pH level of 4. Storing silage in this way preserves the nutritional value of the feed, leading to higher milk yields. The photograph shows some of the 1,000-plus tonnes of silage stored on this site during the winter of 2011-2012.



The storage bags are made from triple-ply low density polyethylene, a recyclable plastic derived from petroleum. The white outer wall reflects light and heat to keep the contents cool, while the black inner wall keeps out sunlight and preserves nutrients.

The bags are protected from sunlight by ultra-violet inhibitors and have a designed life of two years, although the contents of bags have been found to be preserved after seven years. The local squirrels are partial to silage and are an increasing problem, as they eat their way through the skins of the sausages.

The introduction of a robotic milking system has placed extra demand on silage stocks, as the cows’ greater freedom to come and go as they please now means that whenever it rains, they come in from the fields and have to be fed in the dairy instead of grazing the fields.

This sign was first published in 2012.

Pierrepont Farm

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