

Ready-Alert For Haylage

NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — Attitude and preparation are basic to fast, efficient, low cost haylage making, says Ford New Holland Product Manager John Oehler. It's important to be ready before the crop is. If the crop is going into a tower silo, make sure any necessary unloader work is completed while the machine is at the bottom of the silo and accessible. If the silo needs any work it should be out of the way before it's time to cut the crop.

Machine preparation is equally important. Haylage crops lose quality in a hurry if harvest is delayed past bud stage for legumes or the boot stage for grasses and cereal crops. A delay for last minute machine repair added to catchy weather can result in lower quality, too-mature crop that will cut milk production and increase dairy concentrate costs next winter. There's no substitute for being ready, Oehler stresses. Here's his check list:

1. Ahead of season, get the harvester out of the shed, lubricate it and inspect for any necessary repairs. Pay special attention to the little things that are easy to overlook in the rush at the end of season. Look for loose bolts and clean off any dirt accumulation. Examine the PTO U-joints and drive line shields. Repair or replace shields that are damaged or binding. This could avoid a time-consuming accident.

2. Examine safety slip clutches to make sure they're free and not seized up. They're critical for overload protection that prevents mechanical failure. Next, sharpen the knives and adjust the knife shear bar clearance. If it's worn, turn the shear bar to expose a new, sharp edge. Cutterhead maintenance and adjustment maximizes tons harvested in the shortest time with the least fuel. If your harvester has over-beveled knives they may need re-beveling to return them to like-new cutting effectiveness. Under-beveled knives won't need rebeveling, says Oehler.

3. Select a length of cut that's short enough to avoid unloader problems if you use tower silos. For haylage, this may be shorter than the length of cut you used for corn or sorghum silage last fall. A short length of cut packs better for reduced spoilage in a trench or bunker silo, too. But don't cut shorter than necessary for good results in ensiling and feeding. Shorter length of cut takes a lot more fuel and reduces tons harvested per hour. Recutter screens can shorten length of cut but they boost power and fuel use per ton. If tractor power is limited you harvest less. Chopping finer than necessary can cause cow health and production problems, too. If haylage is chopped too fine, cows may need additional dry hay for best digestive function in the rumen.

4. Lubricate and check out the

forage boxes, too. Pay special attention to PTO shields and safety clutches. Check apron chains for tension and lubricate and examine roller chain drives. Adjust as needed. Then repack the wheel bearings if the wagon has had 150 hours use or has been stored outside since last season. Don't overlook a tire and air pressure check. It's discouraging to discover you have a low tire with a full load at the far end of the field.

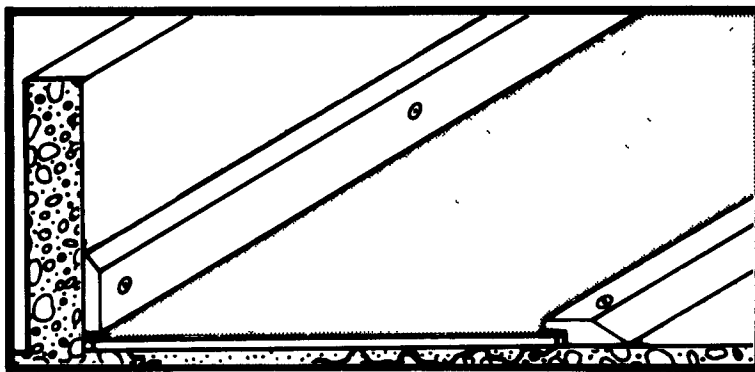
5. Don't overlook the blower. It's a key item in bottleneck-free haylage harvest. In addition to the PTO and lubrication, check paddle clearance. Excessive paddle tip clearance reduces blowing effectiveness that's needed for tall silos. The rule of thumb is that the paddle tip-to-band clearance should be small enough to pick up a nickel lying at the bottom of the band but large enough to pass over a dime. Re-spacing worn blower paddles for proper clearance boosts capacity per horsepower, saves fuel and reduces unloading time.

6. Develop an attitude for efficiency. This includes a no-compromise insistence on safety. Make sure all shields are in place and never adjust, clean or lubricate the harvester until it is fully stopped. Use any available field time wisely. If there's a wait for the next empty forage box, use the time to grease and check out the machine. Resharpen cutterhead knives and adjust the shear bar whenever there's an opportunity. Except for length of cut, close knife-to shear bar adjustment is the most critical item in tons of haylage harvested per horsepower hour. That's the reason it should be rechecked throughout the day.

Making every minute count holds down overall operating time. You avoid costly repairs by preventing problems resulting from neglected maintenance and adjustment. Attention ahead of season saves time later. It can make the difference of getting to a ballgame in time or not seeing the game at all when the alfalfa is ready, Oehler points out.



Ford New Holland's John Oehler says "Preparation and attitude are critical to make effective haylage."

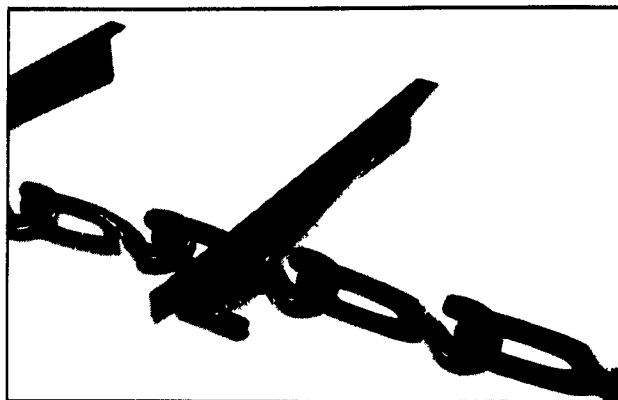


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