Cotswold Seeds Ltd
The Cotswold Business Village
Moreton in Marsh,
Gloucestershire GL56 0JQ

Case Study: Haylage with Mark Jervis

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Mark Jervis works as part of A.M Jervis & Son, his family's business which produces high quality haylage for the horse market under the brand EquiGrass. They supply international dressage and eventing yards, as well as National Hunt and flat racing trainers, along with studs and private yards.

Winderton Farm on the South Warwickshire and Oxfordshire border totals 800 acres, with nearly two thirds (550 acres) down to grass - a range of short and medium term mixtures from Cotswold Seeds.

'We aim to spread our harvest dates as much as possible,' explains Mark. 'So we use early maturing species like westerwold ryegrass, followed by Italian ryegrass, and perennial ryegrass. We also use drought tolerant varieties like timothy or festulolium on lighter land.'

The predominant mixture is the two year Italian ryegrass ley, 'It's perfect for producing quality forage for racing yards and studs,' Mark explains. 'It has the perfect characteristics - good yield and energy with appropriate protein levels. The mix produces plants with long, stalky stems, and when cut, this stemmy material produces the ideal haylage sample demanded by the equine market.

Quality and consistency is a key aim for Mark. Each batch of haylage is analysed and the results Mark describes as 'spot on.' A Typical analysis shows, 10.5-11.5mj/kg of energy (DM), 8-10% protein and 70-80% dry matter.

The leys are usually established through a conventional tillage system. The field is sprayed to make sure it's as clean and weed free as possible. It is then ploughed, followed by cultivations and sown with a tine drill or Vaderstad, before being well rolled to ensure a firm, flat finish. Occasionally the seed is direct drilled with a Cross Slot or Vaderstad drill if conditions allow.

It's given the nitrogen, P&K and sulphur it needs - generally 60-80 kg of nitrogen per hectare, however care is taken over the N application.

'We don't go overboard with the amount of nitrogen we use because we want to keep the protein levels balanced, generally our customers don't want too much protein in the finished product,' Mark explains.

'I ring up and talk to one of the team about what I am aiming for, then they send me a mixture to suit.'

The first cut is taken between the end of May and the beginning or middle of June, depending on the weather. The second cut is taken six weeks later and a third cut is generally at the end of summer, if the weather allows.

The grass crops are rotated with arable. Generally the grass is down for two years, unless it's a perennial ryegrass based mix, followed by wheat, then rape then sometimes another crop of wheat or barley, or another break crop, before going back into grass.

Mark left Harper Adams 11 years ago, and has always used Cotswold Grass Seeds, as did his father before that.

'The service is the biggest driver. One phone call and you can have next day delivery. If we run short we can collect within the hour. The quality of the product is also second to none. The seeds establish just as we expect. We aim to provide quality service to our customers and we use suppliers who offer the same service to us. Cotswold Seeds are certainly the best.'

Date Posted: 14th February 2020