

Poor Weather - Workload Mounts

Tom Ryan, Teagasc, Kildalton
Farmers Journal article 15th June 2002

These are depressing times for farmers but also for their contractors. Farmers are losing out in terms of quality and increased costs. Contractors are also under pressure in terms of meeting repayment deadlines and carrying extra costs. Contractors have less than 15% of the silage crop harvested but their bill for labour at this stage is three times more than normal. Some contractors have recorded a 30% increase in diesel use. Added to this are increased costs due to wear and tear. Tyres are particularly vulnerable under these conditions.

There is a case for increased contractor charges on account of these increased costs coupled with the big bulk of heavy material being handled in first cuts. The fact that pits are likely to be fairly full with bulky firsts means that many people will opt out of taking a second cut. If some contractors are forced to go out of business as a result of this crisis it will have repercussions for the whole silage harvesting scene over the next few years.

Given the difficult situation, contractors have to prioritise their customer service. They will be targeting the farmer with the drier land and good facilities first and he should be prepared to go ahead and not wait for ideal conditions. In a situation like this everyone wants to cut if there is any break in the weather. The contractor may have fifteen bookings as the weather starts to clear and none if it starts to get bad again. Farmers and their contractors should try not to panic or get too depressed about the situation. A bit of understanding and patience is required by all concerned.

The poor conditions will lead more delays and breakdowns. Farmers should make sure that everything is in readiness for the contractor so that there won't be any unnecessary delays. In difficult conditions carrying lighter loads loaded towards the front of the trailers will improve trafficability. In this scenario using more trailers than normal will help matters. These can either be provided by the contractor or by the farmer with possibly the loan of a tractor or trailer from his neighbours. In this kind of crisis co-operation and good neighbourliness are essential.