

Your guide

To selecting a hay or silage contractor

Fodder Brief

If you need a contractor to make your hay or silage, getting the job done right has never been more important.

AFIA has produced, in consultation with our members, including several contractors, this guide to selecting a hay or silage contractor.

Hay and silage are valuable resources and therefore, making a quality product is important, regardless if that is for your own on-farm use or to sell.

This guide is a handy checklist to run through with your preferred contractor to ensure you both understand what it is you are seeking to achieve from the relationship and what expectations you have for the end-product being produced.

According to Frank Mickan, retired pasture and fodder conservation specialist, and AFIA Life Member, there are three basic rules when dealing with silage and hay contractors.

They are:

1. Communicate
2. Communicate
3. Communicate.

A successful relationship with your contractor is best achieved if responsibilities are decided and understood in advance.

The basics: Communication

1. How will you and the contractor communicate and work out together when the time and the crop is right?

Communication between the grower and the contractor in relation to cutting, baling, ensiling or curing time should be confirmed at the start of the contract and it should be decided in advance who will make the call.

Experience

2. How many years has the contractor been involved in contracting? Do you have any testimonials from previous customers?
3. What types of crops has the contractor done before?
4. Do they have the right knowledge and experience for your crop?



5. What is it that you are contracting for – can the contractor accommodate all your needs?
6. How much other work does the contractor currently have on?
7. What are the contingency plans if there is a breakdown?
8. Can the contractor realistically fit in the work – can they be there when the crop is ready, or will they be busy somewhere else when the conditions are right?
9. Is there enough twine, wrap or other consumables available to do the job?

Dirt and rocks in bales should be discussed before contract starts.

Machinery

10. What machinery has the contractor got to do the job and do it well?
11. Or, is the contractor using some or all your machinery to do the job?
12. If it is your machinery, who is responsible for breakdowns/repairs and the costs involved?
13. Is there an understanding that machinery coming onto the property must be free of weeds or other contaminants?
14. Is the contractor going to use a conditioner or not? If a conditioner is to be used, stipulate the type of conditioner to be used for the work i.e. roller, double conditioner or flail. This should be reflected in price.

15. Is fuel included or not included in the contract price?
16. Capacity with big square balers – if you have over 2000 tonnes in one line or batch you may need more than one baler, does the contractor have enough balers to do the job?
17. A maximum of 5% of bales with five strings. All bales with four strings to be re-baled. Have you thought about this and discussed this with the contractor?

Bales of 8x4x3 should be approximately 2.25 metres in length.

When a contractor is struggling to get minimum bale weights, they may make bales longer to get the weight which impacts the grower's ability to load and stack them correctly and/or efficiently.

Cost

18. Is this based on a hectares/bale weights/ number of bales/volumes?
19. If by weight, how, when and where are the weights going to be taken and what baler/ type of bales are they making, and what is the average bale weight from this crop (e.g. oats/vetch/straw etc.)?
20. Does the contractor have bale weight monitoring?
21. Have you agreed how you resolve bale weight issues before the contract starts?

It is worth remembering, if something seems cheap there is usually a reason for this.



Make sure you are contracting for and paying for the job to be done right and expect to pay a reasonable rate to achieve this.

Moisture

22. Moisture monitoring needs to be done well and regularly – who is liable for baling/ensiling hay at too high/low moisture? The contractor?
23. What is the agreed maximum and what is the agreed minimum moisture?

This affects safety as bales cannot be stacked or transported when too much moisture is present – ideally 10-14% moisture for export bales and 12-16% moisture for domestic bales.

Even though you as the grower, may be in a hurry to get baling/silage completed, it is worth remembering that high moisture hay or straw is very hard to sell, and to the untrained eye, hay and straw can look cured, but it may not be.

For example, barley straw is always contentious, it should always be given a few days at a minimum to dry out.

24. Have you agreed how you resolve moisture issues before the contract starts?

Stacking hay

25. How will the stacking be done with a bale stacker or with loader and truck?

Stacking should be completed in a maximum of 48 hours or under two days is ideal.

Remember also that bale stackers have a lot less impact on minimum-till country.

Post contract

26. Have you specified that the site is to be left clean, that soft bales have to be re-baled and that all baling twine has to be picked up?

27. If using your machines, have these been left in fair and reasonable condition (i.e. cleaned) and are they still in good, working order?

Contract and payment terms

28. What are the Payment Terms for the contract?
29. Has the contract been agreed and signed by all parties?
30. Do all parties have a copy of the contract?
31. In the event of a dispute, how will you and the contractor resolve this?

It is a good idea to have a section in the contract for conflict resolution/disagreements.

In Brief

There are many things to remember in hiring a contract for your hay and silage needs.

This checklist aims to provide a basic framework to make the process easier.

Consider these factors as part of your planning:

- Communication
- Experience
- Machinery
- Cost
- Moisture
- Stacking
- Contract and payment terms



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