The correct storage of silage bales is vital to preserve and retain the quality and nutritional value of the feed inside. Handling and storing bales properly avoids damage caused by birds and rodents or even grass stubble. However, there is another potential hazard to baled silage, which has until now been overlooked, and that is the damage which can be caused by wireworms, which can reduce the quality and nutritional value of the feed inside. Farmers need to be aware of the possibility of this type of damage when choosing their silage storage area.

Silage bales stored on grass rather than hard standing could be at risk of wireworms making their way through the wrap, ruining the forage inside.

Wireworms, the larvae of click beetles, are usually found in permanent pasture. Damage caused by them has traditionally been associated with crops following long-term grassland. In recent years, wireworm damage has become an increasing problem for potato growers in Europe. As soil dwellers, they bite through roots and stems at ground level and baled silage stored on the ground could be at risk of attack.

Visible wireworm damage takes the form of 4mm diameter holes created by the worms as they enter the bale from the ground. If farmers wish to store bales on grassland, it is possible as long as they respect the environmental measures set by the EU and national governments to control the pollution of watercourses by farm effluent. To this end, it is generally recommended the bales are kept at least 10 metres away from any water, including field drains and ditches into which silage effluent could enter. However, storing bales on grassland could lead to the plastic film wrap which is in direct contact with the soil being damaged by burrowing wireworms.

The Institute of Grassland & Environmental Research (IGER) recommends that farmers check their bale stacks throughout the winter assessing the silage stretch film for wireworm damage around the periphery of where the bale touches the ground. Wireworm damage will not be an issue on hard standing areas so if any such problems are identified it is worth considering moving the bales to this type of storage area where possible.
Big Bale Storage Tips:

- **Use the right tools** — Even with the best quality film, poor handling of bales can cause puncturing or destroy the airtight seal between layers of film, leading to spoilage. Use a purpose-built handler to ensure minimum likelihood of spoilage. Bars on the handlers should be rust free and smooth to prevent damage.

- **Choosing the storage area** — Respect local environmental directives, storage area should typically be more than 10 metres away from water courses. Storage surface should be flat, possibly hard standing, and free from sharp edges, ideally shady and out of the wind. Ensure no risk of water accumulation between bale and storage surface.

- **Which way up?** Bales stored on its flat end surface are more resistant to damage because more layers of wrap are at the end of the bale and the net or string helps the bale retain its shape more effectively.

- **How many bales high?** Carefully stack wet silage (<25% Dry Matter) on bale flat front and only one bale high; typically up to three bales can be stacked on top of each other when silage is drier (>35% Dry Matter) and bales are dimensionally stable.

- **Protect bales** — If possible, bales should be protected from birds and rodents damage, for example by covering with a close-mesh net. Ensure protection against solvents which might damage the films.