

## **Invention takes guesswork out of silage-making**

*'The New Zealand Herald'* September 12, 2004

Farmers will no longer have to rely on instinct to work out the moisture content of cereal and pasture crops for silage production.

A moisture analyser has been developed by state science company Crop and Food Research and Christchurch company EDAC Electronics to help growers and dairy farmers work out the best time to harvest.

The machine measures the dry-matter content of a range of standing feed crops such as oats, barley, triticale and wheat. Each measurement takes less than an hour and compares the weight of a forage sample before and after drying.

Crop and Food crop physiologist John de Ruiter said as many as half of all silage stacks were made outside the optimum moisture-content level, meaning farmers risked losses in the value of their feed by up to 20 per cent.

"Farmers often rely on a visual observation or feel for the moisture level of their crop, or a basic calculation of the weight difference of a forage sample before and after drying by microwave. Neither method is accurate or reliable."

De Ruiter said the moisture analyser would take the guesswork out of measuring moisture content in the weeks leading up to harvesting.

Silage is a growth industry as a feed for dairy farmers wanting to provide extra nutrition and energy. Crops for silage must be harvested with a dry matter of between 36 per cent and 42 per cent.