



■ **SEALED FOR SALE:** John Gill of 'Rossglass Haylage Ltd', seals another small bag of their 'EH Haylage' brand, ready for sale to horse owners throughout Ireland. FW-1F.

■ **FIRST FOR FRANCHISE:** 'Rossglass Haylage Ltd' has been granted the all-Ireland franchise for Edward Howard's highly successful, 'EH Haylage' brand. FW-1H.

■ **PERFECT FOR PACKAGING:** Iain McMordie of 'Rossglass Haylage Ltd' quality checks the state of fermentation and ensures that there is absolutely no dust or mould for rejection, prior to final packaging. FW-1Q.



# Quality is paramount with bags of haylage for horses

Killough neighbours, John Gill and Iain McMordie have formed a unique farming partnership. Iain Harvey pays a visit to their County Down joint business, which has the all-Ireland franchise for the highly successful fodder brand, EH Haylage.

**D**ROWNED out by the sound of engine revs, the ram of a large, yellow, telescopic arm pumped it out and upward. At the end of the arm, two opposite frames of a three-sided metal grab began to extend away from each other; opening its jaws like Tyrannosaurus Rex, a dinosaur from millions of years ago, with its head on one side. The monster's jaws closed surprisingly gently on either end of a green-coloured, big bale of haylage.

The bale was just one, being plucked from a neat stack of bales that rose virtually to the roof of the huge, former potato storage shed. There had to be thousands of them, a green blur, disappearing into the dark recesses of the building. The ease with which the grab picked the enormous bale from the stack was a little akin to a child lifting a plastic brick from a pile of play-bricks.

The collecting machine began its dextrous manoeuvres and in a few swift turns had reversed its position and was gently depositing the bale beside a conveyor line. The driver widened the clamp jaws and let the bale rest on the ground.

Moments later he was slicing open the bale and placing armfuls of the sweet-smelling haylage, onto the conveyor. With great care, he sorted through each armful, examining the depths of the pale-green fodder. Satisfied about the quality of the haylage, the driver gave the thumbs up to the operator of the mighty machine, with the name 'Trojan Baler' written in large yellow letters on the side. The machine sprang into life with a deep humming sound and its conveyor moved the contents of the big bale steadily into a large blue container. Above the container, another conveyor marched the separated haylage up in an arc, finally to drop the fodder crop into a compressor and baler below. The machine is called a KME and it's operated by two people, business partners and farming neighbours, Iain McMordie and John Gill.

I watched the process of compressing and re-bagging the haylage into small, easy-to-handle bags, printed with the brand name, EH Haylage. The

humming continued, now joined by the thumping sound of a ram hidden deep in the heart of the compressor. The ram pressed the haylage into a suitable shape and pushed the final product out of the front of the baler into a waiting bag held by Iain. Once filled, the bags were sealed and stacked on a pallet, while more and more bags emerged from the 'Trojan Baler'. Eventually, when the original contents of the big bale had been re-bagged, the

**"There were definite market outlets and great potential for good quality, easy-to-manage bales of haylage."**

mighty machine switched off and the pallet, stacked eight layers high had been fork-lifted to one side, we all went across to the farmhouse for a cup of tea.

"Although we're farming neighbours, we've both taken different paths in our farming careers, that is, up until now," explained Iain.

John added, "But we have co-operated over a number of years."

I was sitting in John Gill's farmhouse kitchen, just off the coastal road, leading into the County Down village of Killough, some miles east of Downpatrick. Outside, a chill wind was blowing across the gently rolling arable land, whipping the sea, a mere field distance away, into a frothy, agitated state. The surrounding land was mostly in grass, being grazed by sheep, with some fields sown out in winter barley. The two family farms stretched across the townlands of Killough and Ballylig.

"Although I've always helped out in my spare time on our arable farm, I've worked for DARD for many years and have only recently taken a career-break," said Iain.

John explained his background by telling me that his family used to run a dairy herd on a nearby townland, before the present farm was bought. He'd been growing potatoes and grain successfully for many years, but they both came to the same conclusion some ten years ago, that it would make more sense to co-operate and share machinery.

"It seemed like a good idea to share a self-propelled sprayer and a spreader

and at around the same time, we both joined Lecale Buying Group as it was known then," John pointed out.

"It was a group of farmers in the area, mostly dairy producers, who wanted to buy their inputs more prudently and work together for the common good," he added.

"It's been remarkably successful with around 90 members and a turnover now of some £300,000.

"Anything worth doing is worth doing well, but it takes time and effort and Iain and I are both on the committee of Lecale Group Ltd.

"I had continued to work at potatoes, but by the year 2000, had dropped

my acreage to just 23 acres. Iain chipped in, "Yes and at that time also, I had become part-time with DARD, to help run the farm.

"A couple of years later, we joined a group of farmers on a fact-finding trip to Australia, to look at farming there.

"We saw all types of farming enterprise from cotton-growing to dairying and beef feed-lots.

"It was a sobering experience and opened our eyes to the threats and potential from around the world.

"It's a big world out there and farming and food production is changing and we realised that we needed to change with it rather than fight the global changes."

John nodded in agreement and for a few minutes we exchanged experiences of the world farming scene.

"We came back a little disillusioned about the sheer scale of farming elsewhere," said John.

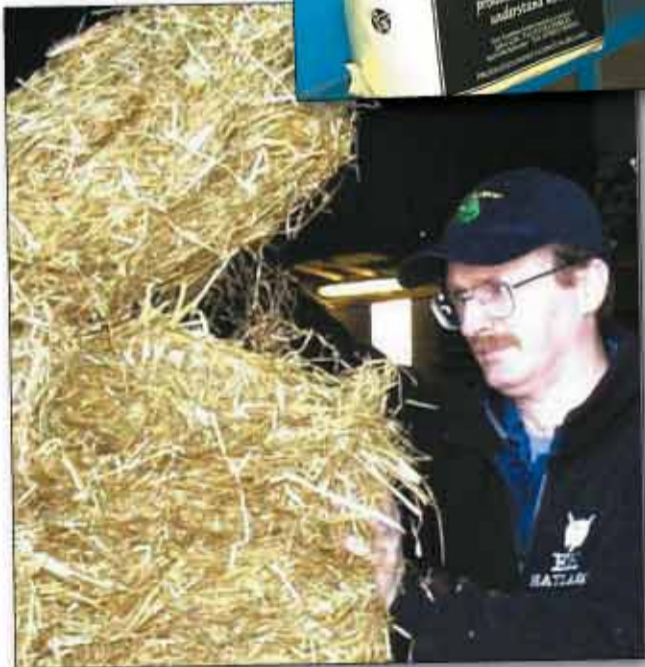
"I had come to the decision that the margin left after investment in potatoes was just too slim.

"That I think finally persuaded us to put our heads together to come up with a way of being more independent and try to control our product from field to market, in a more structured way.

Iain added, "Two years ago my brother-in-law told me that he had received £2-50p a bale for good hay sold to horse owners.

"At the time, grain prices were tight and we decided to look at the prospects for haylage.

"We knew that it would be tempting



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