

Technical Update – Grass Reseeding

Information correct as at 2:00pm on 17.07.2020

- Identify poorest performing grass leys on the farm
- Identify reasons for potential poor sward performance and correct before reseeding
- Use varieties from the NIAB list (or equivalent)

Why Reseed?

A regular reseeding policy will maximise grass quantity and quality. Grass breeding moves on significantly each year (you would not generally use a straw from a bull that was 20 years old and expect the best results). Even under excellent management swards will deteriorate over time. Ideally perennial swards should be reseeded or rejuvenated every 5-6 years, so aim to reseed 15-20% of the area each year so you do not end up with all fields needing attention at the same time.

Newer grass genetics will have improved productivity, durability and disease resistance. This will allow increased pasture response to fertiliser by using more nitrogen-efficient varieties. It also gives the opportunity to address soil compaction problems, reduce weed burdens and potentially introduce clover into the sward.

If you are measuring grazing grass and using grass management software it is very easy to see the lowest yielding fields and many people are amazed at the range of productivity across the farm. On cutting leys use any information you can from yield meters on the forager to a weigh bridge or even just counting loads/ha to identify fields will give the best return from investing in reseeding.

Causes of Sward Deterioration:

A full reseed is expensive so before embarking on establishing a new sward it is worth finding out why the old one has deteriorated. Common causes of a low producing ley include poor initial establishment, poor drainage and soil structure, incorrect soil pH and low nutrient status or poor management by understocking and overstocking allowing non sown species to flourish at the expense of the desired mixture.

Before embarking on a reseed it is worth considering whether the current sward can be “rescued” by appropriate management. For this to be achieved there needs to be a minimum of 60% ryegrass present. If this is not the case, then a reseed will be necessary.

Pre-seeding checklist:

Test soil for nutrient status and pH. Lime is the cheapest input available to help with grassland management, but is often overlooked. Target pH should be 6.5 as below 6 nutrient uptake is seriously reduced. As well as increasing the productivity of the new ley, lime will help reduce the effect of acidity as the old sward decomposes. Add N, P & K to the seedbed depending on soil indices

Finally check for compaction by digging a hole to see if there is an issue and how deep the problem lies. Shallow compaction can be taken out with the cultivations, deeper problems may need a sub-soiler.

Current swards can be improved by oversowing and it is possible to reduce the cost of a reseed by direct drilling. However, now that we have no chemicals for controlling grassland pests these techniques come with a higher risk of crop failure.

Grass mixes:

Grass mixes should use varieties from the NIAB lists which are tested in England and Wales (Scotland has its own recommended list) and are proven for their yield, quality and disease resistance characteristics. The mixes from Advance Sourcing use the NIAB recommended list. Decide on the correct species for the farm's specific conditions and what the sward is going to be used for. If your part of the country suffers from high prevalence of a particular disease, select varieties with good resistance to it.

Keep heading dates as close as possible to ensure that the sward remains palatable whilst maximising yields and select the correct balance between diploids and tetraploids depending on whether the field is going to be used predominantly for cutting or grazing.

Attention to detail:

Reseeding is expensive so it is worth doing well to get the best results.

- Tackle weeds in the old sward with glyphosate applied at the correct growth stage for a clean start.
- Ensure a fine, firm seedbed to promote good seed to soil contact.
- Control weeds at an early stage
- If there is a big population of leather jackets, frit fly or wireworms consider using a break crop to disrupt the life cycle of the pests before re-establishing grass

For further discussion or to help with any questions that you may have, please contact Consultant Support on consultantsupport@kiteconsulting.com or 01902 851007 / 07542 403225