

2013 Grass, Clover & Forage Crop Seeds Guide

A lot of water has fallen from the sky since last February when we mailed out the 2012 guide. At that time we had enjoyed a mild, dry winter and we were concerned about water shortages. How times change. This year, it is clear from the discussions that we are having with farmers, that there are serious challenges ahead and a need to rebuild stocks of forage. Those forages need to be of good enough quality to reduce dependence on bought in feeds and have to be at realistic cost. Currently, fields are still saturated and some soils need to be repaired following field operations in 2012.

Despite the difficult weather conditions, we had instances of each crop doing well in all areas – We need to learn from these examples. There are ways of re-building stocks of quality feed. Hopefully **Field Options** can assist you in that process. **Our motto for 2013: 'Be patient, but be prepared'.**

>12 t Silage from Spring Sown Grass?

Seed Guide p.3

In many areas of the country it is possible, from a spring sowing, to grow more than 12 tonnes to the acre of 25% DM silage (7.5 T DM/Ha) with an ME of +10.5. We have had yields of up to 16 tonnes and 11.5 ME. If drilled by the end of March, **Hurricane II** will be ready for 1st cut in the last 10 days of June. You then cut at five week intervals through into the autumn.

If you have undrilled ground with soil in poor condition, you can plant **Hurricane II** and though the yield will be below optimum, each time you mow (or graze) it, you have the opportunity to pull a grassland sub-soiler through the growing stubble, at a time when the subsoil conditions are ideal. For 2013 we also have versions of **Hurricane** containing fast growing legumes to increase yield, soil fertility and structure.



Wholecrop BPX 11.0 ME - 12.5% Protein - 14 Weeks?

Seed Guide P.12

Time to reconsider wholecrop silage? In recent seasons we have seen increasing sales of seed for spring sown wholecrop. Mixes of Barley and Peas have dominated. Yield has been reliable, quality of silage has been consistently better than other cereals and it can be grown in a wider range of situations than maize. NIAB trials suggest that Barley produces the best combination of yield and feed quality. Adding peas slightly reduces yield, but increases both energy and protein density to a level of 11.0 ME and 12.5% protein – or more.

To get the best results, drill between mid-March and mid-April into soils with pH at 6 or above. Harvest should be mid-late July depending on sowing date, soil type and location. The crop should be harvested with a direct cut disc header and clamped – never baled.



Pointers for Undersowing

Regular reseeding is important if farmers are to maintain high levels of production, the weather last autumn prevented farmers from sowing, so there is a need to catch up. Spring reseeding is unfashionable because of low potential for dry matter yield in the sowing year. This can be compensated for by undersowing spring cereals. In the past when spring cereals were mostly combined, there were risks, but now wholecrop is an option, the cover is harvested earlier and a grassy wholecrop can ferment very well. To get best results:

*** Sow the cereal cover at 70% of the normal seed rate to reduce competition risk.**

*** Drill the cover crop, then shallow drill or broadcast the grass seed on the same day. This gives the grass the best opportunity to compete with the cereals.**



Fodder Beet Potential = 12.5 ME 38 Tonnes/Acre

Field Options commissioned Fodder Beet variety trials in 2012. Even in a difficult year, the average of the control varieties produced 38 tonnes at 15% dry matter. The best performing variety produced another 6 tonnes. Enough energy/acre to produce 15,000 litres of milk or 825 kgs of beef. **Consider where beet may fit into your system.**

Seed Guide p.13



Longer Lasting Red Clover

Seed Guide p.5-6

In the last 10 years the area sown to Red Clover based leys has greatly increased, helping increase protein production, drought tolerance and reducing the need for nitrogen fertilizer. Plant breeders have responded to the demand by putting more effort into breeding. Key issues have been persistence and resistance to pests and disease. Originally, Red Clovers lasted 1-2 years. Varieties like Merviot increased this to 2-3 years then Milvus created a more secure 3rd year. The latest varieties, **AberClaret** and **Corvus**, used in Field Option's medium term Red Clover leys, have the potential to last up to 5 years, but they do need to be managed carefully. Red Clover is a cutting species and though ideal for lamb finishing it must not be overgrazed, especially in the autumn-winter period.



Effective Pasture Repair

Fields have taken a hammering over the last 10 months. In recent weeks many farmers have discussed pasture renovation with us. In most cases this is a combination of soil repair and seeding. To get the best results plan carefully and use the right equipment at the right time. Soil can only be repaired by appropriate aerators or grassland sub-soilers when the soil is dry enough at the working depth of these machines, so be patient, but be ready.

As far as seeding, direct drills appear to be more effective than rake based seeders. This is because of better seed soil contact, so it is clear that rakes can be effective if the soil is really stirred up well creating maximum tilth. Contact us for further guidance or Field Options publish a concise '**Pasture Repair Guidelines**' [Available by post, email, or from the website.](#)



Good Maize = Soil Preparation + Variety

Seed Guide p.15

In all maize growing areas of the UK there were some good crops of maize, this was mostly down to soil structure and associated good drainage, but it was also clear that some varieties coped better than others. Of the early varieties **Adept** performed well above its average and the new hybrid **Severus** was impressive. In the 'very early' group, **Recolt**, **Activate** were excellent, but most reassuring was the performance of **Lapriora** with the best ME & starch.



Grazing Fodder Beet

Seed Guide p.11

Most farmers agree, Fodder Beet is a great feed. The challenge is weed control, lifting it, storing it and effectively feeding it. About 30% of the Fodder Beet sold by Field Options is grazed 'in situ'. An acre of the right variety should feed 120 ewes for one month, costing under 15p/head/day or 25 x 500 kg cows for a month costing about 65p/head/day – True low cost feeding. Cattle benefit from grass headlands or a close runback to lie on. They also need access to silage, hay or palatable straw to cover at least 30% of their dry matter intake. Any bales are best placed in the field well before the grazing period starts to avoid the need to take tractors into out-wintering fields in poor conditions.

The 2012 The winter has been very challenging, but not impossible. You do need free draining soils and a good agronomist to grow the crop, but it is well adapted to the UK.



Direct Drilling Swedes & Kale

Seed Guide p.14

Winter brassicas like Kale and Swedes are great crops, but, with the lack of herbicide options, weed control is becoming a real challenge. The summer of 2012 also resulted in few opportunities to plough and sow for these valuable out-wintering crops.

One area of 'relative' success came from direct drilling into swards which had been, allowed to grow a good cover of grass, sprayed with Glyphosate, mowed for silage or, if there was too little growth for a cut, mob grazed 7-10 days after spraying. Fields were then direct drilled with Swedes or Kale (and slug pellets). Results were surprisingly good and there was very little evidence of the difficult annual weeds. If recovery of the grass was a problem, there are selective herbicides which can effectively deal with the problem.



For detailed recommendations on pesticides contact a BASIS qualified agronomist

If you have not been sent a **Grass, Clover & Forage Crop Seed Guide** please contact us:

For more information contact Field Options on **01544 262 500** or **www.field-options.co.uk**

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