

The Ultimate Cow Grazing?



Grass testing systems rarely exactly emulate the system for which they are used, but over the last five years TEAGASC in Ireland have created a system to identify grasses which meet the growth patterns demanded by paddock grazing systems. They have created an economic index, giving higher weighting to grasses that produce better yield in the key spring and autumn periods.

Grass testing is a long term business, especially as these systems demand that paddocks last for 8-10 years. Initially we were surprised as many of the best performers were not varieties persistent enough to meet the demands of the industry. Now after five years, the list contains an increasing number of the varieties which we regularly use in dairy grazing mixtures.

Selecting only persistent varieties, which are top performing on both the TEAGASC Pasture Profit Index and in the UK's recommended lists, we have reformulated our Ultra-Bite mixture to produce what may be the perfect mixture: **Ultra-Bite MP** – More than 750 acres sown in 2014.

New Grass Trials Generating Interesting Data

Independent testing of our grass mixtures is key to producing better performing pasture. The latest trials were established at Harper Adams in autumn 2013. They are already generating useful information. **NZ Extra-Bite** has stood out in the first year as the best performing medium-long term grazing mixture. Up to the end of July, it had produced over 1 t more dry matter/ha, with particularly strong spring growth, 75% of that extra yield was produced before the cut on 22nd April. **NZ Extra-Bite** is a unique mix of **Matrix** Advanced Ryegrass from New Zealand and UK bred Perennial Ryegrass, including **Aber HSG** grasses with similar heading dates.

In addition to cut plots at Harper Adams, Field Options are assessing varieties within a rotational dairy grazing paddock in North Herefordshire. The trial is screening a range of species of grasses and clovers, mostly from New Zealand in more than 200 plots planted within a field sown to a standard grazing mixture. The plots are being measured before each grazing in a trial which is planned to run for at least 4-5 years, generating information to complement data accumulated in recommended list trials.



The Case for Clover

To include White Clover or not? Yes, it limits weed control options, but adding clover into a vigorous young sward at a later date is not reliable. Do we appreciate all the benefits that Clover can bring? – It is not just extra N. Consider the list below and then re-consider?

- *Better drought tolerance = More mid-season production and higher overall DM yield*
- *Significantly higher content of Calcium, Magnesium, Phosphorous, Copper & Selenium than Perennial Ryegrass.*
- *Improved mid-season palatability plus higher ME & protein % = Better DM intake and increase milk yield by 1-2 litres/cow/day*

Add +/- 150 kg/ha/year on N and you have something worth including in a mixture.

Better Weed Control and Keep the Clover



There are a limited number of herbicides available for the control of key broad leaved weeds in establishing grass, especially if you want to protect seedling clovers. There are options, but they only control problem weeds if used in the early stages of the weed's development. It is of paramount importance that farmers regularly walk their establishing leys after sowing. If there are problems take immediate action as soon as the grass & clover reach the correct growth stage. Do not wait until docks and thistles become too big to be controlled and weeds like Chickweed and Charlock have started to smother young grasses and clovers.



Crown Rust v Resistance
Source: www.afbini.gov.uk

Crown Rust Variety Resistance Option

Crown Rust is common in Ryegrasses, especially in the southern parts of the Britain, but it is regularly occurring further north and west in the UK. It is an even greater problem in mainland of north west Europe, where variety selection for Crown Rust resistance is a key character.

The disease arises in late summer-autumn when every blade of grass is needed. A bad infection can result in a yield reduction of 10-20% during the infected period. Digestibility can also drop 1.5% for each 10% increase in leaf cover and it strongly affects the palatability of the pasture.

Good grazing management is important source of control. Grazing tight during the risk period, assures cleaner regrowth, but because of longer grazing rounds in the late summer and autumn period, risk of occurrence becomes greater. The best source of control is variety resistance, so specify high Crown Rust resistance to your seeds supplier, especially if you have ever had problems. Good fertility, especially nitrogen supply also helps the plant beat infections.

Broad Spectrum Mixes for Dry Season Reliability

The UK livestock industry relies very heavily on Perennial Ryegrass, this species has many advantages, but also weaknesses. There are species with much more natural spring growth, better drought tolerance and improved mineral profile. In the last series of mixture trials that we did with NIAB, the highest yielding mixture contained only 40% Perennial Ryegrass and contained significant levels of palatable modern Cocksfoot and Timothy, these mixtures are also often further enhanced with enhanced Chicory, Plantain and Yarrow. **Endurance II** performed well in the two warm dry spells in 2014.



Herbal Endurance II

Opportunities for Brassica Catch Crops?

Field Options are strong advocates of creating a break after taking out a worn out pasture and before reseeding, especially when the old sward has become dominated by perennial weed grasses such as Rough Stalk Meadow Grass, Yorkshire Fog, Creeping Bent or Couch Grass. These will take more than one dose of Glyphosate to prevent them coming back in a re-seeded pasture.

Brassica catch crops enhance summer or autumn-winter grazing performance. Grass regrowth can be controlled in the establishing crop with post emergence herbicide and/or in the grazed stubble before reseeding with herbicide or cultivations.

Choice of Variety for Summer Use?

Select proven high yielding varieties with good resistance to Mildew, Alternaria and bolting. Winfred has been popular for many years, but is now superseded by the very vigorous variety **SF Greenland** and the Kale x Rape Hybrid, **Redstart**, both widely used in New Zealand and bred originally for summer grazing.



2014 SF Greenland Fodder Rape
Produced up to 10 T/ha at Purton
Manor Farm, Lydney Gloucestershire

Maize Looking Good – New Varieties Listed

The UK maize list for 2015 has now been published. Two varieties introduced by Field Options in 2014 have been added to the 1st choice lists showing excellent yield, stability and very high feed quality: **Sergio** is very early, ripening between Activate and Ambition. It has exceptional vigour, good yield and very good feed quality. **Asgaard** is about ten days later, a very high yielding variety for more favourable areas. In its group it has the highest feed quality available. Both varieties combine high starch with high fibre digestibility for optimum feed performance. They are also performing well over as very wide geographical area from Denmark to Northern Ireland, proving adaptability to a range of locations.

Further new hybrids are due to be listed in autumn 2015: **Rodriguez** a long awaited replacement for the reliable grain and silage variety Lapriora and **Vandiamond** will potentially be the highest yielding variety on the 2016 recommended list. Both will be available in limited quantities in spring 2015.



A Full Cob of Rodriguez